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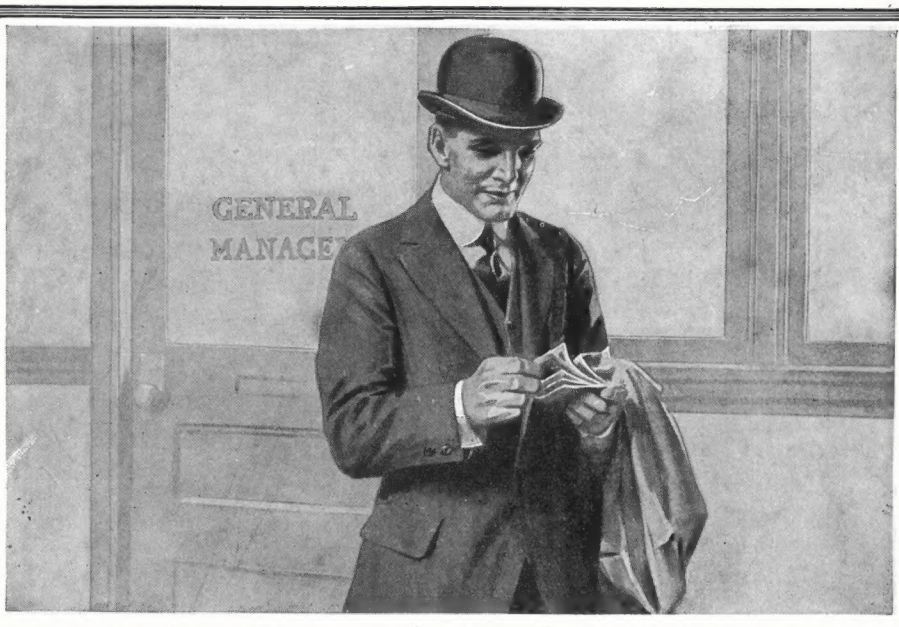

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LIX. JANUARY 20, 1921. No 1.

The Wherewithal

By James Fellom

In this tale of what happened after the robbery of that twenty thousand dollars from the Mohave & Southwestern train, Mr. Fellom has given us a novel of distinctive appeal—the story of the reclamation of an erring man. Billy Gee, hunted but slippery outlaw, was a lucky fellow to have those two women in his life—brave, dreaming "Dot" Huntington and—— But we will let you find out who the other one was. Sheriff Warburton, "Tinnemaha" Pete, sinister Jule Quintell, pathetic Lemuel Huntington, and all the rest of these people of California's "Soapweed Plains" will all grip you equally strongly.

(*A Complete Novel*)

IT was three in the morning, but Geerusalem had not yet closed its eyes. There was too much undug gold in the hills; it was too handy—too easy come, easy go; the days, too short; the pleasures, too wanton, too alluring. The camp of Geerusalem promenaded, gambled, danced, fought, debauched the night away, waiting for to-morrow. Far out on desolate Soapweed Plains rose the intermittent yelping wail bark of a coyote.

The back door of a little store that fronted on the main street opened cautiously. The interior of what was a kitchen was dark; the flower-garden yard into which it gave, was also dark. The shadowy form of a man emerged and halted. A smaller figure followed and paused on the threshold—a woman, her white apron and snowy hair visible through the gloom. The man turned and took her in his arms.

"Don't worry, ma," he whispered, as he kissed her. "I'll drop around again, two weeks from to-night."

"Oh, Jerome, darling, why don't you quit this awful thing!" she half sobbed, clinging to him. "Don't you know how I——"

"Too late, ma. I oughter quit 'fore I began. If I started quittin' now, they wouldn't let me. But I'm tellin' you—don't worry! They can't ketch me. I bin goin' it three years, haven't I? Well, then—— When you see Tinnemaha Pete, tell him to leave you a chunk of that ore. See that he don't tell nobody about findin' it. I figger it's a bonanza. Mebby—well, we'll see what's doin'. I'd better be scootin', ma. An' don't you worry, see?" He kissed her tenderly again.

A moment afterward, he was stealing out an alleyway between two adobe buildings, heading for the back street. That street was gloomy, deserted, the nocturnal population confining itself to the bright lights and attractions of the one business thoroughfare.

Near by stood his horse. He reached it, and with a careful glance around threw back one of the flaps of his saddlebags and plunged a rummaging hand inside. It came forth with a folded piece of wrapping paper and a number of nails he had deposited there the day before.

With a reckless chuckle, he wound his bandanna around his face leaving only his eyes exposed; then he mounted and rode off to the next cross street, and thence to the brilliantly lighted part of the camp. The bulletin board of the Geerusalem *Searchlight*, an afternoon newspaper, loomed big and black on the edge of the sidewalk, in the full glare of the lights. It was one of those moments when the immediate vicinity was clear of promenaders.

He rode over to the bulletin board, un-

folded the square of wrapping paper, and nailed it thereon with the butt of his six-shooter. Then, he fired the weapon a number of times in the air, threw the whole strength of his lungs into a wild howl, waved his hat to a crowd of men standing before the Miners' Hotel, and spurred away around the nearest street corner, bound for the lonely trailless reaches of the Mohave Desert far to the south.

The stream of curious drunken revelers surging to the spot, a few seconds later, read with varying degrees of emotion the rough printed notice on the bulletin board:

> I bin lookin three year for Sheriff Warburton an cant find him. Ill give $5,000 to git akquainted with the county fameous detektive.
> Yore lovin bandit, BILLY GEE.

Lemuel Huntington had told himself a thousand times that his Dot must have an education. He had long since become infatuated with the notion. It had him gripped as tenaciously as the seductive toils of romance had the imaginative Dot enmeshed. It was a mania with him.

"If I got to steal the money, she's goin' to college—the dream of her dear dead mother. S'help me God, I'll turn thief if I got to!"

Lemuel, the Failure, was fifty-one—the age when most men begin to slow down whether they want to or not. Twenty years before, he and his bride had left a perfectly good living in Iowa to try a short cut to fortune in California. The fact that more often than not distance is a most captivating beckoner, did not occur to these happy newlyweds until they reached the Golden State and found that quite a good-sized army—also seeking sudden wealth—had preceded them, and was daily being augmented by recruits from the four corners of the globe.

The discovery appalled them—their capital being alarmingly small; and nearly two years of drifting from little town to little town, just managing to get by, took the heart out of them. Then, one day, Lemuel brought home news of a tract of government land known as Soapweed Plains, on the north rim of the Mohave Desert, with enticing reports of rich mineral belt in the adjacent mountain ranges.

Packing their few belongings, husband and wife bought tickets to the dismal wind-whipped station of Mirage, on the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad, and spent two everlasting days shooing a trinity of stubborn burros over a hell waste into the new Land of Promise. But, again, the captivating beckoner had tricked them. Soapweed Plains was a sweltering realm of sagebrush, sand, and sidewinders, twenty-five miles wide, divided off from the rest of the desert universe by a horseshoe barricade of saw-edge peaks and table mountains that abutted a sky-line mesa, to the south—and by serenading coyotes by night.

In despair, the Huntingtons filed on two quarter sections of sand and rubble; the west side of their claims overlapping a bunch-grass hill; the narrow strip on the east was handy to those scant benefits of irrigation so grudgingly bestowed by the tepid disappearing-appearing Mohave River. Here, at least, they might coax a living out of the soil, said Lemuel. It was a permanent anchorage if nothing more, sighed his wife. And, they started grubbing away a site for a home, and killing the sidewinding rattlesnakes.

Soon, they found that the potato thrived, as did the melon and alfalfa; found, too, that it was a paradise for bees. They contrived to get a cow and heifer, a span of desert-broke horses, and a rattletrap buckboard. Prospectors learned about the Huntington Ranch, and found it handier to go there after certain commodities than to far-off Mirage. As a result, Lemuel added a stock of bacon, beans, condensed milk, sugar, matches, and such supplies to his farm products, and reaped a comfortable profit therefrom.

Then, Dot came—and the lonely brush ranch became the nucleus of Lemuel and Emily's resurrected hopes. For, they began planning wonderful things for their first-born, and, not the least among these things, an education that would make her a great lady of accomplishments, some day.

But the years dragged by in that out-of-the-way land so woefully lacking in transportation—empty-handed years, almost, that held out scarcely more than a possibility that those precious plans of theirs would be fulfilled. It would take a fat purse, indeed, to send Dot to select Longwell Seminary, in San Francisco, and to keep her there in becoming luxury, until she blossomed forth a chosen daughter of California's elite.

When Dot was twelve her brave little mother died. And, for a long time afterward, Lemuel went about like a man searching for something he had lost without know-

ing just what it was. His resurrected hopes died with her. Everything slowed down to a point where he merely held on to a bare living for himself and his child.

To-day, he was a failure, that child eighteen, while the only remaining echo of the precious plans was this secret mania of his, seething in the core of his brain, to see Dot educated before they laid him beside the trim little grave in the garden.

Perhaps, it was this same mania of his that now led him to haunt the nearest place where brains forgathered—the gold camp of Geerusalem, four miles northeast of the Huntington Ranch—and to get to hobnobbing with its insolent brotherhood of mining engineers, promoters, and assayers; a type of individual that looms up in the mind of the crude Southwest as prodigious as totem poles, omniscient and omnipotent.

Whatever it was that made Lemuel enjoy being the butt of this uppish fraternity's quibs and sneers and come back regularly for more, hardly matters. Month in and month out, as often as he could get away from the ranch, he would ride to Geerusalem and spend the day strutting around with the .45-caliber brains of the camp. Accordingly, day after day, Dot, the imaginative, would be left to herself and the weaving of her romantic dreams.

She was a bright little body, this eighteen-year-old daughter of Lemuel, the Failure; face so frank and sensitive, hair so soft and wavy and glossy, throat so round and smooth. Her eyes were large and brown, and sometimes quite sad from gazing too long into the monotonous distances. She was grown to charming young womanhood, but she still retained the fanciful mind of her pinafore days, with all a youngster's fascination for impossible stories of impossible beings.

She would sit by the hour dreaming of handsome blond heroes rescuing beautiful maidens from the clutches of Tartarean villains with wicked flowing black mustaches and bushy eyebrows; of magnificent daredevil bandits succoring helpless widows and orphans—of notorious Billy Gee, even, about whose wild, desperate exploits up and down the Mohave and Colorado Deserts she had heard so much; of hairbreadth escapes, furious duels, and brilliant weddings.

The isolated ranch was an ideal spot for the painting of just such thrilling mind pictures. She could look from the front porch across the desolation that stretched to the violet and yellow scollop of range twenty miles eastward, and visualize in that motionless void every scene her fertile imagination conjured up for her. She lived those scenes, every one of them. They were big moments in her life; palpitating, vivid moments; moments that made her dreary humdrum existence worth while to her.

"Nothing ever happens out here," she would murmur sometimes to the eternal sameness of the plains. "I wish daddy would sell the ranch and move to Geerusalem, or somewhere—where things happen."

On a number of occasions, Lemuel had found her sitting on the front porch, musing into the solitudes, eyes brilliant, cheeks aglow, parted lips moving.

"God, what a pity!" he had lamented to himself each time, as he went tiptoeing off. "It's them fine brains of hers workin'. She's goin' to be a great lady, if I got to sell my soul to do it. I'm jest watchin' for a chanct."

It was well on toward noon of an August day. A fiery sun was churning the floor of Soapweed Plains into a stormy ocean of heat waves. Lemuel had gone to Geerusalem on his usual hobnobbing expedition. Dot, her housework completed, sat reading, in the shade of the passion-flower vine that trellised the porch, a novel borrowed from Mrs. Agatha Liggs, a widow who kept a small dry-goods store in the camp.

Suddenly, breaking on the dead hot silence like a volley of shots, came the sound of hoofs. Dot dropped her book and sprang up, expectantly, for the riders who passed that way, bound to and from the unimportant desert station of Mirage, were few and far between. The next instant, she was staring at a lone horseman approaching, not along the road, but from across country—from the direction of the violet and yellow scollop of range that had formed the background of all her romantic dreams!

She stared in unbelief, amazed for the moment. Then, she saw that he was hatless; that the right side of his head, the whole front of his shirt, were stained a blood-red; that he reeled drunkenly in the saddle. Aghast at the spectacle, she gazed on until the exhausted horse stumbled up to the barred gate and stopped, drooping, rocking on quivering legs. Out of the gate she darted, threw down the bars, and led the animal up to the house, her heart fluttering with excitement and horror.

The rider was in a half swoon, mumbling thickly. Above his right ear was a long, bloody furrow, like the plow of a bullet. The bandanna he had had for a bandage had slipped down over his face, neglected. It was saturated. He had been bleeding for hours, was her horrifying thought. A glance told her he was a stranger. That same glance informed her that he was probably twenty-five, fairly good looking even, though his coating of dust and blood, and that he wore a double cartridge belt and a brace of six-shooters, one of which he still held gripped in his hand.

Ordinarily she would have been unable to handle the dead-weight that he represented, but, now, she managed to drag him out of the saddle and into the house. She got him on the parlor lounge finally, and plunged into the work of bathing his wound and dressing it. Then, she tore away his sodden shirts, replaced them with two of her father's, and brought a dipper of water and poured it in little swallows down his throat.

Sitting beside him, she watched and studied him. Who was he? What was he? The wound? Under other circumstances, it was quite probable that he would have proved a big treat to her imaginative powers; but, here, now, there somehow seemed to be too much tragic reality about him to make her care to commit him and his plight to the wild flings of fancy.

At last he opened his eyes and looked vaguely at her. They were blue eyes. There was an odd hunted glint in them, a smolder of recklessness, a shadow of sadness—exhaustion. He put an uncertain hand to his bandaged head. He looked over the room, then back at her, his wits clearing suddenly.

"Where am I? Whose place is this?" he jerked out, with an effort.

"Lemuel Huntington's ranch. I'm his daughter Dot." She fancied a curious interest had leaped into his eyes. "You've lost a lot of blood, but you'll be all right," she continued, when he did not speak. "If I fixed you something could you eat?" she arose from her chair.

He detained her, his eyes widening in sudden alarm.

"My—my saddlebags! I—they——" he faltered hoarsely.

"They're safe—outside," she nodded. "Do you want them?"

"Please—sister. Bring 'em here. Hurry! 'Cos I—I want 'em handy."

She ran out to where his horse still stood on sagging legs. Unfastening the saddlebags, she carried them into the house. She remarked that while they were not especially heavy they bulged to capacity. She remarked, also, the man's relief at sight of them and how profusely he thanked her. Then, he instructed her to stow them under the head of the lounge, and asked for a drink of water. But when she returned with a dipperful, she found him sunk into a sleep of exhaustion. Whereupon, she darkened the room, closed the door, and went outside to look after the horse.

Watering the animal, she tied him in a stall in the barn to feed. Then she inspected the stranger's saddle, curiously. It was typical of the parts without an identifying mark of any kind, except splashes of dried blood. She tossed it into a corner, fastened the barn door, and reëntered the house. Her mysterious patient still slept. It was a few minutes past noon, and she sat down to her customary warmed-over meal in the kitchen. But she could not eat.

CHAPTER II.

As has been said, Dot Huntington was, notwithstanding her eighteen years, a child of romance. She had been "living scenes" ever since her mother told her the first bedtime story, in the long, long ago. She had wished so many times, in the past, that something really thrilling might happen to her—a big exciting adventure. At this moment she felt that that thrilling something had at last happened. It was like one of her tremendous, wonderful dreams come true.

She quivered rapturously in the realization that she was a living factor in some great tragic mystery, that, hero or villain, this wounded man was her patient, dependent on her. A surge of pity swept suddenly into her heart when she remembered how he had bled, how he must have suffered out in that wilderness of sand and furnace heat. An odd sense of responsibility followed, bringing with it a subtle gratification she keenly welcomed. Why should she question the moral standing of a man half dead?

She sat for a long time, her warmed-over meal cold, ruminating over the decision she had made. Then, again, came the sound of approaching hoofs.

Starting up out of her chair, she listened. It was the gait of a fresh horse. If it were

her father returning from camp? If it were —somebody else? She had not given this phase of the matter a thought. Now, vague fears she could not analyze began to assail her.

The hoofs had fallen into a trot, had come to a halt, ere she flitted through the house, reached the front door and peered out toward the road. A man was just dismounting at the gate. He, also, was a stranger—a big, broad man about fifty, wearing a split-crown sombrero, unusually wide of brim, and baggy trousers stuffed into his high-heeled boots. He, too, was coated with the dust of long riding, his iron-gray mustache almost invisibly white with it, his six-shooter holsters standing out from each hip like pallid cornucopias.

In the act of lowering the bars, he stooped to examine something on the ground. His appearance, coupled with this last suspicious move, was enough to stamp him an officer of the law, even though he was not wearing the identifying star of authority. Dot watched him a few seconds, reasoning that if he were an officer, he doubtless hailed from San Buenaventura, the county seat. Then, she closed the door, locked it, and rushed into the parlor. Her patient was sleeping heavily. She shook him by the shoulder.

"Wake up! Wake up! There's a—a sheriff, outside!" she whispered hoarsely into his ear. He scrambled off the lounge in a panic, wild-eyed, groggy, a curse slipping from his lips.

"Y'sure? Why the hell—— Git back, an' let me at him! I'll give him——" He fumbled feebly for his six-shooters, reeled off his balance, and tumbled back on the lounge. His gaze fastened on her, frightful with appeal. "God, you wouldn't feed me to that buzzard—this way—would you, sister? Gimme a even break," he gasped out.

A strange fire was playing in Dot's eyes. She was pale, but dangerously calm. She leaned over him, and caught him quickly around the waist.

"Come! Stand up! He won't dare go into my room." Through the small dining room and into her own quarters, adjoining the kitchen, she finally staggered with him and helped him on her bed.

"Not a sound, now!" she warned.

"I'll never ferget you for this, Miss—Miss Huntington," he said hoarsely.

Locking the door on him, she hurriedly arranged her appearance, threw on a sunbonnet, and took a glistening something out of the kitchen-table drawer. Then, she walked out the back way, just as the stranger, having finished his investigations at the gate, approached on foot, leading his horse. He touched his hat to her as she appeared around the corner of the house, one hand hidden in the folds of her skirt.

"I jest dropped in to git a swaller of water for my hoss, if you don't mind," he said pleasantly. "It's right hot travelin'."

"I shouldn't wonder. Help yourself." She indicated the trough near by. She looked him over.

While his horse drank, the visitor's eyes wandered apparently aimlessly over the vicinity, and took in the girl, the buildings, the fresh hoofprints in the mud around the trough. He even hearkened to the munching of a horse in the barn—hungry munching. He sauntered back to her, halting a step away.

"You didn't happen to see a feller ride by this way, to-day, miss? Might a-looked like he was wounded?" he said, watching her narrowly.

She nodded. "He was here about two hours ago. Are you——"

"By that you mean, he come an' went—is that it?"

"I said, he *was* here, not he *is* here, sir," she parried, with emphasis.

He burst into a heavy chuckle: mopped his red face, but kept a hawklike eye riveted on her.

"Of course, if he was here you'd jest nacherly out with it, sence there ain't no reason why you shouldn't, eh?"

"Well, I declare! You're a regular mind reader, almost," she exclaimed, with a smile.

He winced, and changed his tactics. When he spoke again, it was in a worried confidential tone.

"Poor Bill! He bled like a stuck pig—I see it out by the gate. I'll tell you how it is, miss. Me an' him's old pals. He gits shot up in a leetle scrimmich las' night, an' I bin tryin' to ketch up with him sence about nine this mornin'. I'm awful anxious to——"

"It's too bad," broke in Dot. "Really, if I'd known that, I'd have asked him to wait for you." He caught the sly derision in her voice, and his jaws set.

"I see you got his hoss in the barn. I s'pose you presented him with another, an' fixed him up so's he could go on comf'table?"

"Why, yes! I bandaged his head for him.

That poor horse couldn't have lasted him to Geerusalem. But how did you ever guess that——"

"How fur is that?"

"Four miles."

"That's about where he's steerin' for, don't you reckon?" shrewdly.

"How should I know? For being his friend, you're asking some of the funniest questions."

"You know a hull lot more'n you let on, miss," he broke in again harshly; his eyes narrowing to pin points. "They ain't no hoss went out that gate sence he come in here. Somebody rode out before, but you helped him outer the saddle an' tramped over them tracks. Come through, now!"

She laughed daringly. "There's more than one way of getting off this ranch, stranger, as you're liable to find out. I've had enough to do with one scamp without being bothered by his partner." She took a quick step away from him, and the hand she had held concealed in the folds of her skirt came forth, holding a revolver. "Travel! Get out and hunt for your friend!"

The unexpectedness of her action took him quite by surprise. He looked hard at her for a few seconds, then he changed fronts. He began to grin.

"Of co's', you don't know who you're talkin' to, miss, or you wouldn't pull a gun that way."

"I'm talking to another scalawag. Are you traveling, or do you want what he got?" There was no doubting her earnestness, and the man realized it. "I'm Sheriff Warburton, of San Buenaventura County," he said, rather awkwardly.

Dot had been looking straight at him, her eyes fiery, her whole attitude one of unflinching purpose. Now, as he revealed his identity, she also changed fronts. She wavered suddenly, surprise, pleasure struggling into her face. She lowered the revolver and laughed.

"Sheriff Bob Warburton! Are you, really? I'm Lemuel Huntington's daughter."

A snort of amazement burst from him. His ruddy countenance expanded into a great good-natured smile.

"Lem's daughter!" he exploded. "Get away! Well, I'll be—— Not that leetle knee-high tike I seen in Jupiter? Le's see, how many years ago was that? Well, wouldn't that bust you!" He grabbed her hand. "An' this is Lem's ranch, eh? Where's the ol' rascal?"

Presently she said: "Won't you come inside, Sheriff Warburton, and let me cook you a little bite?"

"I jest hate to refuse that, Dot, but I got to move. My time's all took up tryin' to run down this pardner of mine," he grinned broadly.

"You're liable to get shot gallavanting over the plains without your star, and telling such awful whoppers," she warned him, with mock gravity.

"I'm more liable to wearin' it, an' tellin' the truth. This galoot is a stick-up—bad clean through. I hear he's got folks in these parts, an' I thought you might be—well, mebby, his sister. You'll forgive my being rough, Dot, but——"

"If you'll forgive my taking care of a wounded man and asking no questions, Sheriff Warburton. And you were quite correct about him not going out the front gate. But there's another gate in the north corner of our field, opening on the road between Geerusalem and Colony Town."

"I was purty sure I was right. You can't fool me on hoss tracks, Dot. Well, I'm goin' on into Geerusalem, furst, to dig up a posse. Reckon I'll meet Lem, too." As he was riding out the driveway, he turned in his saddle and grinned back at her. "If you'd a-hung onto that pardner of mine, Dot, you'd a-collected ten thousand dollars reeward—cash down."

CHAPTER III.

For a long time after he was gone, Dot followed him with her eyes. Not until he was but a wisp of dust in the gray distance, did she turn to go in the house. She was considerably shaken by the ordeal: relieved that it was over. Ten thousand dollars reward, he had said! She went directly to her room and unlocked the door. The fearful eyes of the fugitive on the bed fastened on hers, questioningly.

"He's gone. It was Sheriff Warburton. He's hunting for you—to arrest you." She said this in a quiet voice.

"I—I don't know how to thank you, Miss Huntington," he stammered huskily. "My own mother couldn't a-done more. I—I ain't deservin'. I'm no good." A spasm of emotion crossed his face. Tears formed in his eyes, ran down his unshaved cheeks in little rivulets.

"There, now! Don't think it," she said gently. "I'll fix you something to eat. Then you can sleep. But my father must not even suspect you are here, understand? To-night, when you're stronger, I'll help you out of the house. I'll spread some blankets in the hayloft for you. You'll be safe, there."

She turned to leave the room, but he stopped her.

"Would you mind gettin' me them saddlebags, ag'in, miss? An'—an' keep 'em by me, won't you? I got things in 'em I—I can't afford to lose."

For the second time Dot obeyed his request; bringing the bulging twin leather pouches from under the parlor lounge, and tossing them under the bed. And now she wondered what they contained. While she prepared his meal, she was still wondering. Of a sudden, it dawned on her that in her excitement and nervousness, she had forgotten to ask Sheriff Warburton about the fugitive—who he was, the nature of his crime —everything. And, if she should be harboring a murderer—— The thought filled her with misgivings, dismayed her. She decided finally that she would not allow herself to believe it. He was not the type who would kill a man, she reasoned, and settled her mind firmly on this point. She also resolved to ask the man about himself. There was no hurry. He couldn't leave inside of three days, anyway.

Later that afternoon she gathered together a number of old blankets and quilts and made a bed for her outlaw patient, in an obscure corner of the hay loft under the eaves of the barn. She hid the bloodstained saddle, and drove his tired horse to wander with their handful of stock in the far end of the field. Around five, she made out her father galloping home from camp. Giving the wounded man a few specific instructions, she ran out on the road to meet Lemuel as was her custom.

But Huntington had no smile for his daughter this afternoon. She marked the ill humor in his face and half suspected the cause. A tall, angular, wiry man was Lemuel Huntington, a sprinkle of gray in his hair and mustache, a face more pathetic than aggressive. Association with Geerusalem's uppish fraternity had made him assume its dashy mode of attire—stiff-brim gray Stetson, corduroy suit, his trousers stuffed into yellow laced boots heavy with buckles, the coat, box-pleated and belted à la Norfolk. Just now, as he rode up scowling on Dot, he looked more the prosperous mining man than the humble rancher that he really was.

"What's this talk, Dot, of you side-kickin' it with a bandit?" he began as he dismounted.

"I suppose you've met Sheriff Warburton, and he——"

"Yes, I did. An' he tells me you helped Billy Gee git away—patched him up, give him a hoss, an'——"

"Billy Gee!" she gasped. He was the notorious desperado who had been terrorizing, for years, the border settlements far to the south!

"Yes—Billy Gee. He stuck up the paymaster's car of the Mohave & Southwestern, last night, at a gradin' camp east of Mirage, an' skinned out with twenty thousand dollars. Bob Warburton was on his trail when he done it. Posses are out thicker'n fleas—three from Geerusalem alone. The country's all riled up. What d'you mean by actin' that fool way, Dot?"

"How did I know he was Billy Gee, daddy?" she asked slowly, eyes downcast.

"He must 'a' acted sespicious, didn't he? An' he was winged."

"He was about dead. Would you've had me run a dying man off the place like a dog?" She was looking steadily at him.

Lemuel fell silent a moment.

"Well, p'r'aps, there's suthin' in that," he admitted. "But if it'd bin any one else, 'cept Bob Warburton, we'd have a hard time provin' we wasn't in cahoots with this bandit, I'm tellin' you. He was bad hit, eh?"

She gave him an account of the fugitive's arrival at the ranch, but very carefully omitted to mention that she had taken him into the house. Adroitly, also, she evaded saying that he had gone. Lemuel said no more just then, though it was quite plain to her that some thought still troubled him.

While he attended to his chores, Dot started getting supper ready. Now, she was afire with excitement. Billy Gee, that terrible personage of whom she had heard such awful thrilling things, was locked in her room—lying on her bed! Her prisoner! Her romantic brain reeled with ecstasy over the realization. And Sheriff Warburton—a dozen posses—were frantically beating brush the length and breadth of Soapweed Plains for Billy Gee; for the ten thousand dollars reward. She had outwitted them. She, Dot Huntington!

The whole situation struck her as ridiculously funny. She leaned against the kitchen table, and choked with silent laughter. This, indeed, was the big exciting adventure she had longed for all these years; infinitely big and exciting, pregnant with possibilities. Then she remembered that her father said Billy Gee had stolen twenty thousand dollars the night before, and she grew grave. From reflecting on it, she shortly interpreted the reason for her patient's concern over the safety of his saddlebags. They contained his stealings—currency, most likely, weight and bulkiness considered!

Lemuel sauntered in from the barn some minutes later. He prepared to wash.

"I don't see his hoss, Dot," he said abruptly.

"I turned it out with the rest."

"You give him Baldy, I s'pose?"

"No. Sheriff Warburton just got the notion that I'd traded horses, and I didn't tell him different," she explained frankly.

Lemuel, in the act of rolling up his sleeves, gazed hard at her for a moment. He frowned.

"You meanin' to tell me a dyin' man, with a sheriff on his heels'd resk it on foot—a man like this here Billy Gee? D'you think I'm a fool, Dot?"

"Well, count your stock if you don't believe me, daddy. You're doubting every word I say, to-day." She spoke in such a meek, sorrowful voice that he was moved to cross the room, and kiss her on the cheek.

"I ain't aimin' to doubt my leetle gal. Lord bless you, hon, never!" he murmured lovingly. Then he laughed: "The on'y thing I got to say is, it'll be good-by Billy Gee 'fore the week's up, if he don't git suthin' faster'n two laigs under him. He must 'a' left his saddle, an' everythin', eh?" he added craftily.

"Everything," nodded Dot in a very decisive manner.

Lemuel went back to the basin and silently proceeded to wash. But he said to himself:

"No bandit livin' would do sech a crazy thing—wounded, to boot. You might fool Bob Warburton, Dot, but you can't fool yore old dad. There's ten thousand dollars hidin' on this ranch, this minit."

After supper he composed himself in his favorite chair and smoked his pipe, and mused as usual. It was a quiet night—exceptionally quiet, thought his daughter, who, mindful that only a thin board partition separated her room from the kitchen, grew more and more fearful as time passed in the knowledge that an accidental sound or movement by Billy Gee would lead her father to investigate. She trembled at the consequences to herself. She kept busy with the noisy task of scouring pots and pans, wishing and wishing that Lemuel might retire early. But he had no such inclination.

"At three dollars a day, a man'd work more'n twenty year for twenty thousand dollars, Dot," he observed, breaking a long silence. "An' this Billy Gee party gits it overnight."

"Yes, daddy. But he doesn't enjoy it," she replied. "Think of him being hunted from place to place, like a wild animal!"

"When a feller tries an' tries till the heart's kicked outer him, 'tain't hard to tempt him. That's how I feel about it." There was a harsh ugly note in his voice.

She paused in her scrubbing, and gave him a quick searching look. Some grim expression she saw in his face filled her with sudden misgivings.

"I mean that!" he said roughly, with a vicious jerk of his head. He had taken the pipe from his mouth; his gaze was fixed accusingly on her. "Looket me! I bin kicked an' kicked! Year in an' year out I bin a-goin' it, till I'm bruck down—petered out. An' what've I got? What've you got?" He stiffened in his chair, gulped out suddenly: "An' I've tried—God Almighty knows! An' yore poor ma she—she died a-tryin' an' skimpin' an' dreamin'——"

"Father!" cried Dot, her face pale and drawn, eyes wide with alarm.

Sitting there in the lamplight, he was wild to behold; his features distorted into hideous lines; his hands clenched, trembling spasmodically. He laughed bitterly.

"To-day, you doctor up a low-down murd'rous skunk that'd cut our throats to-morrow for the fun of it. An' ten thousand dollars gits by us, eh? D'you hear that—ten thousand dollars for Billy Gee, dead or 'live? D'you now what that means to us? Do you reckon I'm goin' to let you——"

"Blood money!" she gasped. "Daddy, would you want me to——"

"I want you to c'nsider me an' yoreself—our c'ndition," he slung in savagely. "I bin wantin' to give you an edjucation—to carry out yore ma's dyin' wish. I want you

to be somebody. We bin livin' like dogs, too long. I'm damn sick of it! Outside o' Agatha Liggs, looket how them town hussies treat you! An' them edjucated shysters who ain't fit to grease my boots—what do I git from them? We need money. We got to git money—now, right off! If you can't help me git it honest, by God, I'll start out to steal it!"

He had gotten to his feet as he spoke, and crossed the kitchen. He stood, now, glowering down on her, cupidity, fury, desperation flaming from his eyes. Terrified she stared at him. She knew at last the reason for his violent mood; what he was intimating. And there was no way for her to dodge the issue.

"You think I know where Billy Gee is ——" she began with an effort.

"You got him hid out, an' don't lie to me," he roared. "He's too sick to ride, an' you're takin' care of him! You can't make no damn fool outer me, young lady. Where is he? You're goin' to tell me, or by the Eternal, I'll——" He moved his clenched fists menacingly.

CHAPTER IV.

But Lemuel Huntington, as has been suggested, was not a strong character: not even in this, the worst moment of desperation he had ever displayed. Nor had he suspected the existence of the broad strain of high-spiritedness in his daughter's nature. The launching of that threat of his, roused her like the sting of a whip. Her terror vanished. She strode up close to him, and let her eyes burn into his own furious ones.

"Father, another word and I'll leave this house. And—I'll never come back!"

He did not answer. He continued to look at her, amazement, indecision growing in his face. He had never seen her so dreadfully calm, so white, before. She had never threatened such a thing, before. From out in the darkness came the shriek of a predacious nighthawk. Presently, he turned and walked back to his chair, and began filling with trembling fingers his forgotten pipe.

It grew very quiet. The old clock ticked tiredly. After a little, he heard a sob and, glancing around, saw her leaning against the wall, her face buried in her hands. Thereupon he put down his pipe and went over, and took her in his arms. Some time afterward, as he lighted his candle to go to his room and kissed her good night, he said gently:

"I jest git so disapp'inted with myse'f, honey. Yore ma an' me used to plan so many big things for our leetle daughter. I've wanted to do so much for you, an' I ain't done nuthin'. But I've forgot all about Billy Gee. It ain't worth quarrelin' over, is it, dearie?"

Dot lingered in the kitchen, until she was sure he had gone to bed, then she made hurried preparations to spirit her outlaw patient out of the house. Filling a bottle with hot coffee, she threw some bread and meat into a paper bag; after which she tiptoed to her room, stealthily unlocked the door, closed it behind her, and lit the candle on the bureau. A glance, and she saw her bed was empty—the window open. Billy Gee was gone: so were his saddlebags!

For an instant, she stood perplexed. But she breathed easier, vastly relieved that he had thus chosen to steal from the house without her aid. Stepping over to the window, she flashed the candle outside, and listened. There was no sign of him, no sound. He must have found his way into the hayloft, she decided; she recalled the fact that she had described the location of his new hiding place to him, that afternoon. But from reflecting on his weak condition, she became more and more concerned about him, resolving finally to investigate his whereabouts and take him the lunch.

It was only a matter of four feet from the window sill to the ground, and a far safer means of exit from the house at this late hour, particularly after the way her father had acted. So she put out the light and let herself down noiselessly into the strip of garden, and flitted off to the barn. With a subdued little cough to herald her coming, she climbed the short flight of steps to the loft, and struck a match.

He was there—standing knee-deep in the loose hay, spectral, sinister, a six-shooter glinting in his hand. At sight of her, he lowered the weapon and clutched a tie beam for support. Ere the match went out, she reached his side.

"I was leary it'd go hard on you, if he ketched me in there, so I sneaked out," he explained, in low tones. "I heerd it all, an' I'm sorry I got you in so much trouble. I'm goin' to resk it, to-night."

"You mustn't," she whispered. "The

plains are alive with posses. You'd never get——"

He chuckled softly. "Wunst I git a-goin', I'll be orright. The moon's comin' up, an'—I got folks livin' handy."

"Here's some food." She thrust the bottle and paper bag into his hand. "I'd counted on you staying till you were stronger—three days, anyway. You'd be safe. Why don't you?"

"He's too sespicious. He'll start huntin' me up, see if he don't." He broke off. "I—I won't ever ferget what you've done for me, Miss Huntington. An' you wouldn't give me away, would you? An' you're powerful in need of money? I ain't had anybody be so kind to me——" His voice trailed off into silence.

"You poor wounded wild animal," said Dot gently. "Even a kiyote is better off than you. Don't you know any different, or ——" She paused, and while he waited for her to finish—"Do you want to repay me for everything I've done for you?" she added.

Through a square hole under the eaves, the first white beams of the moon were just struggling in. She could see his face indistinctly; the white bandage around his head.

"Say it!" he nodded. "Anythin' you want done."

"Quit this miserable life. Go far away where you're not known, and start honorable—somehow. You can do it. Will you? To pay me back?"

He caught her hand suddenly, fervently.

"I will, Miss Huntington. I swear it! Look! You turned down ten thousand dollars—stuck by me. I'm goin' to show you what I kin do for you. Some of these days you're goin' to hear from me."

"I'm so glad," she breathed. "I'd be so proud to know that I helped the hunted animal, Billy Gee, to be a man."

A short heavy silence fell. From somewhere in the ground floor of the barn, a board expanding with the cool night air, snapped sharply.

"I come up here to git a coupla blankets, sence I can't take my saddle," he explained. "Would you fix 'em for me?"

She found them half folded, made a neat roll of them, and looped them for carrying with strips she tore from her apron. As she prepared to go, he spoke again.

"Miss Huntington, I'd like you to know I ain't near's bad as they say. I ain't never yet killed a man—wounded 'em, yes. An' with all I've stole, I'm all but broke. That's honest!"

"But you held up the paymaster's car, didn't you?" she asked.

"Yes. But I didn't hold onto the money, bein' wounded, an' Warburton——"

"What was in your saddlebags that you told me you couldn't afford to lose?"

"My mother's pitcher, some clothes, an' a lot of leetle doodads, I'm keepin'. I always have 'em along with me. But I want to tell you ag'in, that I'm never goin' to ferget you. You're goin' to hear from me, Miss Huntington—some time. An' I hope you'll be proud."

Dot crept down the steps, shortly afterward, shut the barn door after her, and darting across the moonlit yard, climbed back through the window into her room. And for the remainder of the night, she lay wide-eyed in bed, snug in the bewitching embraces of romance and imagination.

After her departure, Billy Gee remained in the hayloft for some time and leisurely ate the food she had brought him. At intervals, he looked at his watch, by the aid of a moonbeam streaming in through a crack in the boards. When one o'clock came, he got cautiously to his feet, took up the roll of blankets, and started downstairs.

From far out on the plains, rose the wail-bark of a foraging coyote. There was no other sound. That semiarid land lay mute and mysterious, and teeming with tragic potentialities.

He reached the ground floor and, like a shadow, made his way carefully toward the rear door of the barn, heading for the field and his horse. As he fumbled for the hasp, a dark figure emerged from under the steps behind him. He felt the sharp dig of a six-shooter in the small of his back. A voice hissed in his ear:

"Up with yore han's! Make a move, an' I'll kill you!"

In a twinkling, he was stripped of his guns. Then, his captor—Lemuel Huntington—unhasped the door and herded him outside, and down a narrow lane between two corrals, until they stood in the field.

"Turn yore face to the moon, an' le's git a squint of you, Billy Gee!" said Lemuel. He studied the outlaw a few seconds. "So my gal was passin' up ten thousand dollars for the likes of you, eh? Well, I won't! Now, listen, clost! Me an' you's goin' on to Geerusalem, to-night, see? You're wanted, dead

or 'live, an' it's up to you how you care to be deelivered. I don't. Savvy! Now, march acrosst to them hosses!"

CHAPTER V.

When Dot awoke next morning, after a fitful two hours' sleep, it was nine o'clock. She sprang out of bed and hurried into her clothes, certain that her father was considerately waiting his breakfast rather than disturb her. But on entering the kitchen, she found that he had not yet been about. This fact first astonished then alarmed her. She hurried to his door and rapped, breathing a sigh of relief when she heard him yawn out a reply.

Nevertheless, she thought it strange that he should thus oversleep; for not in many years—and then, only, on the few rare occasions that they had been out late the night before, attending some party at a neighboring ranch—had he failed to have the fire in the stove going for her. Later on, it struck her as quite probable that their quarrel had been the means of keeping him awake. And out of this conviction was born an acute feeling of remorse which dissuaded her from commenting on the lateness of the hour.

For that matter, he also was silent on the subject. He came into the kitchen, stretching himself tremendously, grinning, in the best spirits she had seen him in for many months. She attributed it to his desire to have her forget their differences of last evening. So she met him halfway in the effort, and laughed merrily when he jested about the professional fraternity he hobnobbed with in camp, and at his sly insinuation that Agatha Liggs would make an adorable stepmother for some girl. As he picked up his hat to look after his chores, he caught her in his arms, told her how fondly he loved her, and that her happiness meant everything in the world to him.

But, alone back of the barn, his buoyancy rapidly vanished. He looked down the lane between the two corrals, and reflected again on his capture of Billy Gee; and on the way he had marched the outlaw into Sheriff Warburton's room in the hotel, before daybreak, and delivered him over to the astonished sleepy-eyed officer. Again, he felt an ecstatic thrill over the realization that he had the certified check of the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad—for ten thousand dollars!—in his pocket, that very moment. Moreover, there swept through his breast a wild elation that his Dot now would get the long-cherished education; that here, at last, was the crystallization of his dead wife's dreams, all but fulfilled. But with all of this, regardless of the unbounded exultation that these thoughts gave him, he could not put out of his mind what Billy Gee had said to him in Sheriff Warburton's room—how he had said it, the look in his eyes as he said it.

"Huntington, I'll be free one of these days. When I am, I'm goin' to hunt you up. An' you're goin' to pay, Huntington. Remember, now! You're goin' to pay, damn you!"

There had been something so frightful, so murderously frightful, in the way Billy Gee had said this. Try as he would Lemuel had not been able to forget the outlaw's look, the icy cut of his voice. He was doomed to be haunted by them; to have memory rehearse them over and over again to him. True, Billy Gee was even now being taken out of the country, southwest to the county seat, San Buenaventura, heavily shackled, under the watchful eye of Bob Warburton; and countless things would happen ere the bandit served out the long prison sentence that confronted him. But the fact that he would serve it out—that he would be free, some time—was an overshadowing menace, that laid a clammy hand on Lemuel's heart.

For many minutes he stood and stared across the plains. Doubtless, Billy Gee would hunt him up and kill him, he told himself. A vicious bandit of Billy Gee's type would stop at nothing to get revenge. He shook his head worriedly. After a little, he remembered Dot's interest in the man. One thing was certain, she must not know what he had done—not until the episode was old and forgotten. He knew it wasn't love which had prompted her to succor Billy Gee. Dot was sentimental, romantic—she was just sorry for the scamp. But after their quarrel last night, she must never suspect how he had treacherously watched her, seen her go into the barn, and laid in wait to capture the man she was trying to save.

So, while Dot got breakfast together, her father made plans whereby she might not know for years to come, just what had befallen the magnificent bandit. In the first place, he was determined to get her out of the country that she might not hear about his capture of Billy Gee; secondly, he cast about for a logical explanation of how he came to have sufficient money to afford a

journey such as he contemplated. He knew Dot was too familiar with his affairs not to question his sudden acquisition of any considerable amount of funds.

Therefore, during the meal, he mentioned rather casually that he was going to Geerusalem to see if he could negotiate a loan off of Warburton; backing up the propriety of his action with the remark that he had once helped the sheriff when he was financially "down and out."

Dot was interested. To her question as to how much he intended borrowing, Lemuel grinned:

"A coupla thousand dollars, anyway. An' I'm purty sure to git it, at that."

She stared across the table at him, perplexed for the moment. What possessed her father, this morning? He acted so changed —so self-confident, so resolute; as if he were laboring under some great excitement. The strange way in which she looked at him made him hasten to put at rest any suspicion she may have had.

"I bin thinkin' it all over, Dot, an' I decided that what me an' you need is a leetle more pleasure, an' not so much stickin' to a ranch, year in an' year out. So, I'm goin' to borry some money off o' Bob, an' we're takin' a trip—Frisco, Noo York, or some place. Le's be good an' happy, wunst, what d'you say?"

She brightened instantly. Her eyes widened, sparkled with expectation.

"It'd be wonderful, daddy," she cried. "But—but you'd have to pay the money back, and it'd be so hard——"

"We ain't goin' to stop to think of that, hon. I'll do the worryin'. If I git it, you'll go, won't you?"

"Go?" she echoed joyously. "Daddy, I've been wishing and wishing, months and months and years, to see cities and orchards and rivers and street cars and the ocean."

They talked on, Lemuel controlling with difficulty the wild enthusiasm that consumed him; Dot giving her eagerness unbridled play, planning and scheduling an itinerary with a dispatch and thoroughness that made him fairly marvel at her cleverness. Shortly afterward, however, as he was galloping toward camp, he laughed aloud over the shrewd way he had deceived his daughter, clever as she was.

Dot stood on the porch looking after him. She watched him out of sight, her brain in a delicious stupor at the glorious prospect of seeing the great fairyland far to the north; that wonderful region she had dreamed so much about. For some time, she reveled in the thought, until her eyes turned to the violet and yellow scallop of range in the distance. Her mind returned to the present. Then—to Billy Gee. How was he faring?

The day was hot, similar to yesterday. It was very silent, too. Presently it struck her, that to-day was different than any she had ever known. She glanced over the garden. It seemed lonesome; she had never thought it lonesome before. The feel of the ranch filled her with an odd depression. Everything looked so colorless, so awfully the same. She contemplated the violet and yellow scallop of range, again. That bleak desolation where she had visualized the figments of her imagination, appeared to have lost its magic. The range seemed faded, like the colors of a shabby old crayon. She turned into the house, and entered the parlor.

For many seconds, she stood and gazed down at the lounge, and began reviewing, as she had done a number of times, her meeting with the notorious Billy Gee—from the moment of his coming, until she bade him good-by in the half light of the hayloft.

"He isn't the terrible person they say," she told the parlor lounge. "The poor fellow! He was so grateful—and his voice was so gentle."

She walked into her bedroom, still thinking of him. And it came to her suddenly that she had hidden the worse criminal of a generation in that bedroom; that he had occupied her bed, even! She halted in the middle of the floor, and blushed furiously over the reflection. What would her father say if he knew? And her dear old lady friend, Mrs. Agatha Liggs? Or Sheriff Warburton? The recklessness of her act, now struck her with full force.

But the next instant she was defending herself with the assurance that Billy Gee was bent on mending his ways. He had promised her he would reform. She believed him. If he were captured—— Somehow, she felt no anxiety on that score. He had shown no alarm, and, besides, he had mentioned having relatives living close at hand, denoting that he would find safety with them until such time as he could leave the country.

"You're goin' to hear from me, Miss Huntington—some time," he had said. She experienced a little thrill when she recalled that

he was giving up his vicious career because she had asked him to. Yes, she told herself, she would look forward from now on, hopefully, to the day when she would hear from him.

She had been standing near the bed, deep in thought, gazing at the old-fashioned bureau. Now, her eyes became fixed on a narrow edge of green showing over the top of the middle drawer. Abstractedly, she reached down and plucked at it with thumb and forefinger. She drew it out—a ten-dollar greenback. An instant, she stared dumfounded at it, then she pulled open the drawer, revealing a mass of currency of all denominations. With a cry, she staggered back, glaring at it in fearful amaze.

CHAPTER VI.

Geerusalem was a camp of many people of many waspish dispositions. The engrossing business of making money and spending it kept this desert settlement steadfastly steering a more or less wabbly, law-abiding course. For, like all frontier camps, it boasted its furious six-shooter forays, stealthy knifings, mob uprisings, its denizens of dive and den.

Established before the "blue-sky" law was written into the statute books of California, the metropolis of Soapweed Plains was the Mecca of the "wildcatter"—that thrifty rascal who tempts the gullible women of other climes to invest their nest eggs in mining stock fit only to start the kitchen fire. These gentry were the leading citizens of Geerusalem, though every one knew them to be rascals; autocratic, unprincipled fellows, who paid homage to none save the mining engineer and occasional moody geologist who dropped unannounced into camp.

The .45-caliber brains with which Lemuel Huntington hobnobbed, was made up for the most part of these wildcatters—promoters, they styled themselves. He was their standing joke, their dub, the something at which they could sling the garbage of their talk. From which it may be seen that he did not rank very high in their estimation. Heretofore, he had felt oddly gratified over the notion that he associated with them; they had seemed to his way of thinking to be the examplars of education and refinement.

This morning as he rode into camp from the ranch, on what he had led Dot to believe was a "borrowing" expedition, he was an entirely different Lemuel Huntington from the good-natured dub of yesterday. He had captured the terrible much-feared desperado, Billy Gee. He had won a comfortable fortune by his bravery. His Dot was going to receive that long-dreamed-of education. His breast was filled with it; his head reeled with his own importance.

Geerusalem was seething with excitement. The main street was clogged with men, discussing Huntington, Billy Gee—the dramatic entry at daybreak of captor and prisoner, while shotgun posses were scouring the country over a radius of fifty miles.

As Lemuel hove into sight, some one recognized him. The news of his presence spread like wildfire. A crowd surged after him, gathering in size. He had not expected anything of this nature and it embarrassed him. He wished now, that he had come in by a back street. Flustered, he looked about over the heads of the crowd. He spied Mrs. Agatha Liggs. She stood in the doorway of her little dry-goods store watching his approach up the center of the street. As he came abreast of her, he smiled and raised his hat. Then, he flushed; and in the belief that she had not seen him, bowed again.

She was looking straight at him, and he noted that her thin, pathetic face was unusually pale and drawn; that her fragile little body was more stooped; that her lips were strangely pursed. She looked at him, fixedly, with an expression in her old eyes so icy, so accusing, as to make him feel foolish and uncomfortable. That look of hers flattened out his conceit as nothing else could have done. He trotted on up the street to the bank, dismounted, and went inside wondering just why Mrs. Liggs had snubbed him.

The crowd that had followed him, collected before the building and, watching him through doors and windows, saw him cash the Mohave & Southwestern's ten-thousand-dollar certified check. As he came out the door, acquaintances began hailing him. He heard comments on every hand.

"Gritty chap. You wouldn't think it to look at him, would you?"

"Brought him in single-handed. Fine work, pardner!"

"Done overnight what a hundred posses couldn't do in three years."

"Good boy, Lem! Oh, you Nick Carter!"

Red-faced as a turkey gobbler, he led his horse to a livery stable; then he strutted

down the plank sidewalk, the mob stringing out back of him. Presently he entered an auto-stage office, talked to the ticket seller about mileage and rates, and ended by paying down the rental of a machine, to be ready in an hour. Ten minutes later found him swaggering big-chested into the U. & I. Saloon—hangout for the .45-caliber brains of Geerusalem. He glanced boldly around at the uppish fraternity, deigned them a nod and ordered a drink. This was the red-letter day in Lemuel Huntington's life.

He leaned luxuriously against the bar, peeled off a bill from his great wad, and to those who came up to congratulate him on his daring feat, remarked with considerable loftiness:

"Yes, I'll allow it takes somepin' better'n edjucation to handle a man like Billy Gee."

Downing his drink, he was turning to make his stately way out of the place, when he heard his name called, and some one caught him familiarly by the arm. He recognized a young mining engineer friend, a recent arrival from Los Angeles. With him was a tall sharp-eyed man, twenty-seven or thereabouts, pleasing of face, and with a grave courtesy that instantly marked him in Lemuel's mind as a stranger to desert life. He was dressed in a whipcord suit, that, however, was partly concealed beneath a voluminous dust coat. On his head was a golf cap, a pair of goggles thrust up over it; and he carried driving gauntlets in one hand.

"Mr. Huntington, meet Mr. Sangerly," smiled the mining engineer. The men shook hands. "Mr. Sangerly's father is western manager of the Mohave & Southwestern, and he wanted to thank you in person for your splendid service to his company, through your capture of Billy Gee."

Lemuel rubbed his chin in embarrassed fashion.

"They wasn't nuthin' much to it, Mr. Sangerly," he muttered.

"Indeed there was," declared the other. "This outlaw has robbed our trains, eight times in the last three years. Besides our losses, Wells-Fargo has suffered greatly. You've done us a great service, and the general office is being advised on the subject." He paused. "There was a little matter relative to your capture, that I wanted to speak with you about—if you have time, and if Mr. Lennox," glancing at the mining engineer, "will excuse us."

Three minutes later, they were seated opposite each other in a booth, a table between them, the waiter departing with their order.

"Now, to start at the beginning, Mr. Huntington," said Sangerly, coming directly to the point, "Billy Gee robbed our paymaster's car at a grading camp a few miles east of the station of Mirage—this you doubtless already know. Well, Sheriff Warburton, who has been in close touch with our Los Angeles office ever since he got on the bandit's trail a week ago, wired us the same night of the robbery. From the tone of his message, Billy Gee was heading north, and his capture would be effected within ten hours. That was the gist of the thing. Anyhow, I started by auto yesterday morning. As it happened, you beat Warburton to the honors. You brought Billy Gee in, but the twenty thousand dollars he stole from our paymaster is missing."

"Yes," said Lemuel. "On our way into camp this mornin', I asked him in pertickelar about that, an' he said it was in safe hands."

Sangerly lit a cigarette, nodded. "That's just what's keeping me here. I'm going to find out, if possible, who's got that money. I intend to arrest the party as an accomplice. There's not the slightest doubt in my mind that this person has been harboring the outlaw in the past, and profited at the expense of our company. You heard, of course, that he had relatives living somewhere on the plains?"

"I don't believe it," said Lemuel. "That's what Bob Warburton was tellin' me. He told me the only reason that folks got that idee, was because after robbin' a train, Billy Gee always headed this way an' disappeared. But look at how far it is to the railroad!"

"Yes, but don't forget that this is the nearest point of habitation, Mr. Huntington. Now, let me explain something to you. According to Sheriff Warburton, whom I had a long talk with before he left for San Buenaventura this morning, he followed Billy Gee's trail over every foot of the way—fifty-odd miles, and barren desert all of it. By barren I mean flat, sandy country, and lacking those landmarks which would tempt an outlaw, hard-pressed, to hide his booty. Moreover, Billy Gee was wounded—shot by one of the paymaster's crew as he was riding away. My opinion is that he brought the money direct to your ranch, and——"

"I can't see how you figger that out, Mr. Sangerly," broke in Dot's father hurriedly. "Ain't you kinder insinuatin' a leetle that

I'm in cahoots with a bandit?" he added in measured tones.

Sangerly hastened to make amends. He caught the other's hand, shook it laughingly.

"Hardly an insinuation, my friend," he declared. "Certainly, I couldn't imagine an accomplice doing what you did. It's not reasonable. But just follow me and you'll agree with me that my theory is correct. Now, this is the exact situation: Here is Billy Gee with Sheriff Warburton at his heels—not over two hours behind him. Billy Gee is wounded, bleeding badly. He is traveling over a flat country where there is no chance of hiding his money with any assurance of being able to find it again—lack of landmarks, you understand? And all the time he is becoming weaker from loss of blood. From what little I saw of him today, it is a question in my mind whether he would have risked getting off his horse to cache his stealings, if he had had a chance, through fear of not being able to mount again.

"Anyhow, it is certain that he was more concerned over getting his wound attended to than he was about the money. So, he must have pressed forward as rapidly as his horse could carry him. Particularly, since Warburton says that he had him in sight after daybreak and up to the time he dropped off the mesa onto the plains. Now, Mr. Huntington, the paymaster crew told the sheriff that Billy Gee stuffed the twenty thousand dollars in currency into his saddlebags. And you brought him in without his saddlebags, I believe."

"That c'rrect," agreed Lemuel, with a troubled frown. "I found he'd crawled in my barn. Afterward, I located his hoss down in the far end of the field. But——"

"I asked the sheriff about that very thing, but he said that all he knew was what you had told him," interrupted Sangerly. "His theory was that the man had turned his horse into your field when no one was watching, and hidden his saddle and saddlebags, afterward finding his way into your barn to wait until he was strong enough to reach the home of his friend or relative. That's what I believe, Mr. Huntington. I am convinced that Billy Gee cached that money on your ranch. He could lay low at this rendezvous of his, and some dark night when the whole affair had blown over, he had intended going out there and digging up the cache."

Lemuel nodded slowly. "It sounds reas'nable. An' you aim to look over the ground, I reckon, to see if you kin locate the cache."

"Precisely. Warburton has promised me that he'll try to sweat the man into telling. Meanwhile, I'll work on this end with two railroad detectives whom I brought with me. You'd have no objection, of course, if we spent a few days snooping around the place, Mr. Huntington?"

"Not at all. Me an' my daughter's leavin' for a two-week trip, to-day. But I'll stick the key under the front-door mat, an' you kin make yoreself to home."

Sangerly thanked him. They left the booth and walked out to the street together. As they parted, Lemuel said:

"When do you figger you'll be out to the ranch?"

"This afternoon, some time. Be assured we'll not abuse your hospitality, Mr. Huntington. And I hope to see you on your return."

CHAPTER VII.

That talk with the son of the western manager of the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad did not set well on Lemuel's mind. Even the fact that the Geerusalem *Searchlight's* bulletin board, with chalky eloquence, proclaimed him "California's Bat Masterson," carried little if any thrill for him. Sangerly's talk sounded like trouble in disguise. Sangerly's deduction of what had happened to the paymaster's money seemed alarmingly correct. And on the heels of this thought came the distressing suspicion that Dot, having assisted Billy Gee during his whole period at the ranch, must know something about the disappearance of the saddlebags. Sangerly was right. No man in the bandit's condition would have lost precious moments hiding his stealings, particularly in a trackless, changeable sand waste such as lay to the south. That twenty thousand dollars was hidden on the Huntington ranch.

Then he recalled that Sangerly had mentioned two railroad detectives who were aiding him in the search. If they should dig up evidence involving Dot? Sheriff Warburton had not so much as hinted about her harboring the bandit, from what Sangerly had said; yet Warburton must have surmised it. Warburton was a good friend, certainly. The more Lemuel reviewed the situation, the more was he convinced he must get Dot out of the country before these detectives began

investigations. He shuddered at the disgrace of her name being mentioned, even in the remotest way, with the whole ugly affair. Later, he would question her. He felt confident that she would give him full details on the subject.

He had still a few minutes left before the time he must report back to the auto-stage office. These he devoted to hiring a man who would look after the ranch during their absence. Then, he sought the seclusion of a back street; wandering slowly toward the stage headquarters, his mind busy with the disturbing angle that threatened to sully the name of Huntington. And so preoccupied was he, that he entirely forgot to pay Mrs. Liggs a visit, to inquire the reason for her cold treatment of him shortly before.

He found the machine ready and waiting for him. Clambering into the rear seat, he instructed the driver and was soon whirling out of camp toward home. When within a mile of the ranch, he happened to glance in the direction of the low line of hills against which his acreage abutted. A man was trudging along through the brush, steering diagonally for the road. He was less than a quarter of a mile away, and Lemuel squinted at him curiously.

"Who's that sun lizard? Kin you make him out?" he asked the driver.

"That's Tinnemaha Pete—a prospector. You must know him. The whole camp does. Hangs around Mrs. Liggs' store a lot. Used to be her husband's partner, I hear."

"Sure enough. Come to think of it, I met him there wunst."

"Poor old devil! If it weren't for her, he'd starve," said the driver. "She's been grubstaking him for years—and he's never found anything. Never will, I reckon."

The machine sped on, its dust cloud trailing across the flat, enveloping the bent shriveled form of Tinnemaha Pete, rocking along on unsteady legs, a canvas bag over his shoulder, bound for Geerusalem. A few minutes afterward, the automobile stopped before the Huntington gate, and Lemuel sprang out and hurried up the walk toward the house. Dot, attracted by the sound of the car, had come to the front door. He greeted her with assumed excitement.

"Git ready to travel, hon!" he cried, as he put his arm around her and drew her into the house. "We got money. Looket!" He fished out a handful of bills from his pocket and flourished them before her face. He laughed gleefully. "What'd I tell you, eh? Bob Warburton loaned me two thousand dollars on my note. Think o' that! Ain't that dandy? Come on! Chuck some duds in a valise. We're startin' right out on a big time—me an' you." He romped around the room with her, like an overjoyed boy.

"But, daddy," she cried, in bewilderment. "I—how in the world—— Why, you don't give me time to——"

"You don't need nuthin'. I'm buyin' you a hull bran'-new outfit, soon's we hit the city. Hurry up! We ain't got all day to talk about it. We're strikin' south to Mirage. I'm on'y takin' a shirt an' a pair o' socks, myself." He headed for his room.

"But who's going to look out for the place—the chickens and stock and——"

"I got it all fixed for a man to come this afternoon," he called out. "Hurry up, hon! Do's I tell you, can't you? That driver is chargin' fifteen dollars an hour."

Dot capitulated. She hurried into her room, and shut the door. Hesitating an instant, she locked it cautiously; then she dragged a suit case out of the closet. For some seconds, she stood motionless, in troubled thought. In the middle drawer of her bureau lay a fortune in stolen money. During her father's absence in camp, she had counted it, and found that it aggregated what he had told her Billy Gee had stolen from the paymaster's car of the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad Company—twenty thousand dollars.

What must she do with this money now? Until Lemuel had burst in upon her, urging this uncalled-for hurried departure that for some unexplained reason he had given her not the slightest hint about, she had quite decided that the best method of returning this money to its owners was to go to Geerusalem and place it either in the hands of the constable or the postmaster. This she was to have done in person. For, if there was one thing on which she had settled her mind firmly, it was that her father should know nothing about this vast sum being in her possession. After his display of desperation last night, and the fearful threats he had made, she shrank from telling him, lest in a moment of recklessness he might be tempted to force her to turn the treasure over to him, and appropriate it to his own uses. She had grown sick at the terrifying thought.

Another thing—one which had impressed her more deeply than she really believed at

the time—was the realization that Billy Gee had left her this fortune out of appreciation for the little she had done for him. The act bespoke the character of man he was at the core. It was about as big a gift as he could have made to her. He had risked his life to get it—been shot in the bargain. While she and her father had been quarreling over him, he had lain in the darkness of her room, listening. He had learned that they were very poor; that the dream of the Huntingtons had been to give their daughter an education; that that daughter was not for surrendering him—outlaw, though he was—to gain the comforts that ten thousand dollars' reward would bring. Later, in the hayloft, he had misled her as to the contents of the saddlebags, in order to make his secret gift certain of acceptance.

Just now she stood and studied over what she should do with this unwelcome gift, in view of the fact that her father's impetuousness had upset her plans. But there seemed no way except to take it along. It would be nothing short of folly to leave it until their return; risk losing it by theft or fire. They wouldn't be away but a few days, and once back home she could carry out her original intention of putting it in the hands of the Geerusalem authorities for transmission to the offices of the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad.

So thinking, she wrapped up the stacks of bills in her mother's old silk shawl, tied the package up securely, and packed it with some articles of clothing into the suit case. Then she began dressing hurriedly, with growing excitement, for her long-wished-for trip to the city was about to be realized.

Half an hour after Lemuel arrived from camp, he was locking the door and placing the key under the mat for Sangerly. Father and daughter seated themselves in the car, and like two children embarking on some glorious adventure, began their journey down the hot, desolate floor of Soapweed Plains to the dreary little railroad station of Mirage. They reached there around four o'clock, ate dinner in the combination saloon-store-restaurant, and boarded the northbound train before dark.

But, as it happened, not until the conductor came to collect their tickets was Dot reminded that she had not asked her father how long he contemplated to be gone. The uniformed person had passed on when she broached the subject.

"Are we going to be away very long, daddy?" she asked.

"We sure are," said Lemuel cheerfully. "We're out for a big time. An' we're goin' to see everything worth seein', you kin bet on that."

"But how long, about—a week or so?" she insisted. "There was something I wanted to attend to when I get back——"

"Get back?" laughed Lemuel suddenly. "Listen, hon! Furst, me an' you's goin' to have the time of our life. Then——" He broke off and, looking fixedly at her, grinned. "You've seen the last of Soapweed Plains Dot, for anyway three years. I'm toggin' you up like a queen, an' you're goin' to Longwell's Seminary for to be edjucated. That's another reason why I borried the money."

Thereafter, for two straight hours Dot argued against this decision of his to send her to school. She objected on every ground she could think of. She was too old; they needed the money for other purposes; she wouldn't leave him to live on the ranch alone; she didn't want an education. But her tears and supplications were of no avail. There was no shaking that mania of his.

So, in sheer exhaustion, she finally gave up and, lapsing into silence, took up the momentous problem of what she should do with the stolen treasure she was bringing along with her wrapped in her mother's old silk shawl. After long reflection, she concluded that she would turn it over to the San Francisco authorities—that it really did not matter which civil authorities received it, since it would be forwarded to the railroad company, anyway. Having relieved her mind thus, her thoughts drifted to Billy Gee. She wondered where he was, and if the wound in his head was healing—if he was thinking of her. Foolish, vagrant little thoughts, they were; but somehow, they seemed to her to be very serious, and certainly pleasing.

Lemuel sat and also thought until long after she had fallen asleep. He was so jubilant with himself and the fulfillment of the dream of his life, that for him sleep was impossible. His mind in a riot of joyous anticipation, he sat planning to make his brief stay in San Francisco a memorable event. He threw back his head against the plush seat and chuckled silently at the clever manner in which he had enticed Dot into leaving the ranch; how splendidly his lie about borrowing two thousand dollars from Sheriff

Warburton had worked out; how successfully he had manipulated affairs so that Dot would possibly never know that her father had played the sneak to capture Billy Gee, the bandit. There was also considerable satisfaction in the knowledge that he, Lemuel, had spirited Dot out of the country before Sangerly and his bloodhounds could even see her.

He told himself that if for no other reason than to secure Dot against annoyance he would keep her future whereabouts secret. No one would know that she was attending the Longwell Seminary until the search for the missing paymaster's money had come to an end. Meanwhile, he would find an opportunity to question Dot, and learn what she knew about it.

Morning found him still wide-eyed, gazing intently out of the car window at the multiplying miles of rich San Joaquin Valley acreage flashing by. Around seven o'clock, the train stopped for a few minutes at Tracy, a junction town, and passengers from the north began piling in. A newsboy came hurrying down the aisle, clamoring his wares. Lemuel stopped the youngster and bought a paper. Dot still slept, and he composed himself in the seat to read. The next instant, he caught his breath in sudden alarm, and sat bolt upright; staring at the black display lines on the front page.

DESPERATE BANDIT ESCAPES.

Billy Gee Attacks Sheriff, Plunges from Fast-moving Train Near Burbank.

For a long moment, Lemuel glared fearfully at the headlines, then he sank back in his seat. He felt Dot stir. He looked at her, and saw that she was waking. Whereupon he smuggled the paper into his pocket. But from that instant forward, he carried in his mind a picture of Billy Gee standing in Sheriff Warburton's room in Geerusalem; heard again the bandit's ominous threat.

CHAPTER VIII.

Alexander Sangerly—"Lex" Sangerly his friends called him—was a democratic type of Californian, who did not believe that the fact that his father was western manager of the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad system should of necessity mean that his son must take any exalted credit unto himself. So, notwithstanding the fact that Lex held the important post of division superintendent, he was not above meeting the rank and file of his department on their own plane, mixing with them, addressing them by their first names, and conducting himself generally in business as well as social affairs very much like a red-blooded human being. Incidentally, it might be well to mention that, although only twenty-seven years old, he was already blossoming out into a prominent railroad figure, with the likelihood of making good future presidential timber for some transcontinental road.

The gold camp of Geerusalem was Lex's first acquaintance with a desert bonanza settlement—one in the high noon of its prosperity; its mines giving up great fortunes, its people drunk with success, its night life unlicensed, violent. Geerusalem had a strange fascination for him; the fascination that one feels who looks for the first time on something horribly real.

But apart from his curiosity and interest in this waspish camp, Lex had suddenly discovered, on the very day of his arrival, a most important reason why he was glad that he had come to Geerusalem. As he drove his high-powered roadster up the main street, his eye alighted on a modest little signboard nailed above a small store, crowded between two large adobe buildings. It read: "Mrs. Agatha Liggs, Dry Goods."

Lex had read that modest little sign, with a thrill of joy. There could be but one Agatha Liggs in the world, he felt; and that was the dear little woman whom he had known far back in his boyhood days—the mother of his boy chum, Jerome Liggs. His earliest memory of Mrs. Liggs and her son was when he was five years old, living in the sleepy town of San José, with his parents, during the dark period of his father's striving to rise out of the rut of clerkship. The two families had been next-door neighbors for a number of years, and he remembered Jerome's father as a big jovial man, who used to drive a truck by day and play cards with his father by night.

Jerome and Lex attended the same school. Mrs. Liggs' son was a sturdy, fearless little chap, the dunce of his class. Lex Sangerly, on the other hand, was timid and delicate, studious, and a star scholar. But they had grown to be chums, perhaps because of their very dissimilarity. Lex never really knew how many times doughty Jerome had stepped in and beaten a boy bully for him. Nor could he ever remember the number of occa-

sions he had occupied Jerome's bed with him; or had he ever forgotten the innumerable slices of Mrs. Liggs' pumpkin pie he had devoured.

Up to the age of twelve years, this Damon-Pythias friendship had continued uninterruptedly. Then came the time when Sangerly, senior, had invented a cold-storage system that had found marked favor with the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad, with the result that, besides purchasing his patents, it employed him to oversee the installation of the apparatus in its refrigerator cars.

In the years that followed the departure of the Sangerlys from San José, to their new home in Los Angeles, the Liggs family had dropped out of sight. Lex had once heard from a mutual friend that Jerome's father had been killed in an accident, and that the widow had moved from San José. But young Sangerly had never quite forgotten his little chum, nor those fragrant slices of pumpkin pie. Now, here, in this wild desert camp of Geerusalem he had discovered Mrs. Liggs again!

It is not to be wondered at that, after his talk with Lemuel Huntington in the U. & I Saloon, and before he began his search for the missing twenty thousand dollars, he must first pay a visit to the little dry-goods store. At the very moment that Dot's father was speeding out of town in the automobile that was to take him and his daughter on the first leg of their journey to San Francisco, Lex Sangerly halted before Mrs. Liggs' establishment.

He found to his surprise that the place was ostensibly closed for the day—the blind drawn down over the little show window. Nevertheless, he knocked sharply and peered into the dark interior through the small glass panel set in the upper half of the door. Presently, the door in the rear of the store opened and, after a short hesitation, the proprietress appeared. He noted that she was wiping her eyes on her apron, arranging her white hair and smoothing out her dress as she approached. The next moment she was standing in the entrance, looking at him inquiringly through her glasses.

"Mrs. Liggs!" he cried out in glad tones, snatching up her withered hand and shaking it. "Bless your dear old heart! Don't you know me?—Lex Sangerly!" He beamed on her, while she squinted at him, searching his face with infinite gravity.

She was a tiny, tired-out, timid mite of a woman, around sixty-five, with hair like snow and frightened, great, faded blue eyes, just now with a trace of moisture in them. Her dress, gingham and rather old-fashionedly made, was the most correct thing in feminine attire worn in the camp; at least, so said the population of Geerusalem, the man-town.

She studied Lex for a few seconds, then her eyes lighted up like twin stars.

"Lex—Lex Sangerly! You dear, dear boy. Of all things! Oh, I'm so glad—so glad to see you, Lex!" She choked suddenly.

Leading him inside by the hand, she locked the door and escorted him to the little living room, back of the store. He did the talking. He threw himself into a chair and regaled her with a brief summary of what he and his family had been doing since she last saw them. It was a dazzling recital, with happiness and success through every portion of it.

"And now," he concluded, "the old man has ordered me to stay out in this desert until I find out what Billy Gee—the outlaw who was captured last night—did with the twenty thousand dollars he stole from our company. I guess you've heard about it."

She stopped crocheting to disentangle a stitch. It seemed to engross her deeply.

"Yes, I've heard," she said, at last. "Have you any idea——"

"Not the slightest. I'm making a search of Mr. Huntington's ranch. That's where he was caught. By the way, you must know Huntington—a rancher, south of here?"

She nodded over her needlework. "He made ten thousand dollars mighty easy. The easiest money Lem Huntington ever made—bringing in a dying man." There was a little strain of bitterness in her tones.

"He's rendered the community a great service, Mrs. Liggs, we can't overlook that fact," said Lex. "This notorious rascal, Billy Gee, has held up M. & S. trains for the past three years, robbed passengers, and laughed at every posse that ever took up his trail."

"That might all be, Lex, but there's some good in the worst of us."

He laughed. "You're not very familiar with this scamp's exploits, I can see that, Mrs. Liggs. Trainmen who have brushed up against him say that he'd as soon kill a man as look at him."

An audible gasp escaped her. Her withered face paled, and set ever so little.

"It ain't true. Lex, I want to tell you one thing about Billy Gee that you can believe, and that is—he's given away every cent he ever stole. Don't ask me how I know. Ask any man on the street, and he'll tell you that there'll be more broken hearts and empty cupboards now that Billy Gee is—is gone, than if the Geerusalem mines shut down tomorrow." She paused, then added: "I know it don't sound right, Lex, but I wish—I wish he'd never been caught."

Sangerly regarded her for a moment, soberly. Some appealing, subtle sadness he saw in her face caused him to burst out with a merry laugh and lean over and pat her hand.

"I wouldn't try to disillusion you for the world, Mother Liggs," he cried. "You nor any other woman could condemn a man of Billy Gee's type. You all feel for the wayward man. You pity him. You want to help him. For that is the mission of this wonderful mother-love of yours." He digressed: "Before I forget, I want to take you out for some real rides in a wonderful roadster I have. Which means, of course, that you must introduce me around among the first families of Geerusalem, and all that."

She glanced at him, admiration in her eyes.

"Did you meet Dot—Lem Huntington's daughter?" she asked presently.

"No. Is she one of the belles of the camp?"

"Dot Huntington is one of the finest girls in the State, Lex."

"Pretty?"

"Pretty as a picture, and sensible. A girl any man would kneel to," she said solemnly.

"You interest me, Mrs. Liggs. You must tell me about this charming little lady. But right now, I want to hear about your affairs. How you have been getting along. And you haven't even mentioned Jerome. Where is he?"

It was very quiet in Mrs. Liggs' living quarters, quite like a sanctuary; the three rooms flanked on either side by drab, adobe walls and overlooking a back yard of some size, cut up into little plots—the only flower garden in Geerusalem, with a patch of vegetables growing in one corner. A gate opened into an alleyway that led to the rear street.

"Jerome?" echoed Mrs. Liggs, after a short interval. She was gazing intently at her crocheting. "Jerome is dead, Lex." She spoke slowly, haltingly.

"Dead!" He looked hard at the silvery, bowed head a moment. Then he snaked his chair over to her side, and took her hand tenderly in his own. There was a short silence. "I am so sorry to hear that," he said. "How long ago——"

"Lex, dearie!" she broke in sobbingly. "Don't let's talk about it, please! The wound is too fresh, and—I can't explain. Some of these days, I'll tell you the—the story. When I saw you looking so happy and prosperous, I couldn't help thinking ——" She buried her face in her apron and wept disconsolately.

Some time afterward, she told him about herself and her little family from the day fifteen years ago, that the Sangerlys moved from San José. It was much the same account of striving that any of thousands of American mothers might relate—the indomitable ceaseless struggle to get ahead.

"Then, after Mr. Liggs' death, we came to Bakersfield," she concluded wearily. "I went into the delicatessen business and did well. One day, Jerome—— It was a hard battle alone, Lex, but I saved money. About a year ago, I came to Geerusalem and opened this store. I'm the only woman in business, here, and every one patronizes me." She paused, gave him a faint smile. "The boys won't allow anybody to run opposition to me."

Two hours passed quickly, considering that Mrs. Liggs insisted that Lex have lunch with her, disregarding his attempts to explain that he had an appointment with his two detective companions at one o'clock. So it was early afternoon when he finally picked up his hat and prepared to depart. At that juncture there was a knock on the kitchen door. Mrs. Liggs opened it, admitting an outlandish, shriveled-up, old man of seventy, who halted just inside the entrance and fastened his watery blue eyes suspiciously on Sangerly.

"This is Tinnemaha Pete, Lex," smiled Mrs. Liggs. "He's my prospector, and some day we're going to strike it rich. Ain't we, Pete? This here's Mr. Sangerly."

"I see that skunk, Lem Huntington, sashayin' around in a ottermobile," cackled the funny little old man. "Cuss-durn his hide! I'd like to—— Hoo, hoo! I'd fix him. What's yore business, Mr. Spangeree? You're sorter high-toned, ain't you?" He

threw a canvas sack he had over his shoulder, into a corner of the room. "There's some rock, Agatha—tol'rable, tol'rable."

Tinnemaha Pete was a horrible example of what the Southwestern desert does to men who laugh at its death-dealing forces and flirt with its snares too long. His body was warped, his skin dry and tough as leather, his eyes rheumy from sunglare. A pathetically few thin long hairs of beard still remained to him, and a scanty rim of gray around the back of his bald head, were the only evidences of a once great, brown, wavy mane with which nature had endowed him. Tinnemaha Pete knew the Mohave Desert from center to circumference, better perhaps than any one man of those times; and he had taught Billy Gee what he knew, making the bandit invincible when fleeing through that desert No-Man's-Land, with posses yelping at his heels.

A few minutes after the arrival of Tinnemaha Pete, Lex took his departure. Mrs. Liggs saw him to the door, and watched him wistfully as he walked rapidly away down the street. Then she shuffled back to the kitchen, dropped into a chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"What ails ye?" cried Tinnemaha Pete. And because he knew, and was powerless to do anything, he began a falsettoed string of abuse leveled at Lemuel Huntington, Sheriff Warburton and that destiny which shapes men's lives.

"Jerome, son!" sobbed Mrs. Liggs despairingly. "Why couldn't you have been like him! Pete, that was Jerome's chum. I—I had to tell him Jerome was dead. I couldn't tell him the truth."

The queer old desertarian broke into a gale of wild laughter.

"Mark ye! Mark ye, Agatha!" he squeaked excitedly, his watery eyes afire. He trotted up close to her, stooped over her, and shook a bony claw of a finger into her face. "Mark ye, if Jerome-boy gits clear of the scalawag sheriff—he'll off, like a jack rabbit! Hain't I learned him how to hide-an'-go-seek in that sand pile? Glory be! She's a great sand pile, Agatha. An' he knows her—every hide-out, every water hole, the ol' Injun trails, the ornery tricks of her an'—an' there's more'n a dozen box cañons, that he kin claw up outer, that he knows. An' nobody knows, but me an' him. Wommin! He'll off like a jack rabbit, wunst he's in the clear!" He paused, glaring about the kitchen. The canvas sack he had tossed on the floor, caught his attention. "There's the rock he wanted, Agatha. It's lousy with gold—an a ledge that'll go down to hell. I've called her the 'Billy Geerusalem.'"

CHAPTER IX.

Lex Sangerly and the two railroad detectives drove by automobile to the Huntington ranch, that same afternoon. It was around four o'clock when they arrived there and, admitting themselves into the house with the key which Lemuel had put under the front doormat, started inspecting the premises. The sleuths, Ray Coates and Harry Tyler—former plain-clothes men of the Los Angeles police department—began an exhaustive investigation of the immediate neighborhood; they found the tracks of Billy Gee's horse approaching the ranch and even traced the outlaw's progress into the house. It required considerable work to do this last, and the continued use of a magnifying glass by which they followed the disconnected trail of blood specks from the spot where Dot had dragged the wounded bandit from his saddle until she got him finally into the house. These two Mohave & Southwestern bloodhounds also established the fact that Billy Gee had occupied the parlor lounge.

Meanwhile, Lex had lingered indoors. He had made two discoveries. Wandering into Lemuel's room, he had come across the photograph of a girl. It was standing on the bureau—a photograph of Dot taken a year before, in Geerusalem, and showing her in the first full bloom of charming womanhood. Lex picked up the picture and looked at it for a long time. It engrossed him. He was impressed by the freshness and sensitiveness of the face, by the wholesome, gentle look in the great eyes, withal, by that indefinable charm that attaches only to things of desert life, be they a humble wild flower, a mocking bird's nest in a cactus, or a daughter of the range.

Curiosity led him at last to steal a look into the room this remarkably pretty girl had occupied. He entered it, and glanced around. It was a clean little room, plain-furnished, but there were artistic touches of color here and there, that gave it cheer and warmth. In a frame against the wall was a picture of Mrs. Agatha Liggs. The sight of that picture pleased him. Somehow, he felt himself grow kindly inclined toward this stranger girl.

And, presently, he made his second discovery. Investigating the faint, bloody finger print of a man on the window sill, he found that its owner had gotten out of the window. A closer search of the soft soil of the garden beneath the window, revealed the fact that a girl had also left and reentered the house by the same way. He stood in Dot's room again, thinking gravely over the matter, when Coates and Tyler came in from the barn. He heard them talking in the kitchen. A few moments later Coates—a poker-faced individual never without a cigar in his mouth—stuck his head in the door, walked in.

"We found the saddlebags, saddle and bridle, Mr. Sangerly. They're smeared over with blood. Somebody hid 'em, pretty carefully," he said.

"Where?"

"In the barn. The saddlebags were in the loft—covered over with hay. The saddle, Tyler found under a pile of old gunnysacks. There's a bed been made up in the loft, and somebody et something there not later'n yesterday, judging from the soft bread crumbs."

"Then, our theory that Billy Gee cached the money here is about right, isn't it?" said Lex.

Tyler appeared in the door. He was a ferret-eyed stocky man, with a close-cropped, iron-gray mustache and a perpetual frown.

"It's a funny proposition, Mr. Sangerly," he began. "I'd say that this bandit got help at this ranch. Look here! A woman dragged him into the house, and doctored him on the parlor couch. In the back of the barn, just outside the rear door, we find two rolled-up blankets tied for slinging over the shoulder with this," holding out two strips of calico. "And, here, in the kitchen, is the apron this cloth was torn from. My theory is that the Huntington girl——"

"I can't see that it makes much difference, now that he's been captured, whether he received aid or not," interrupted Lex. "It's not improbable that he was helped. When a man is wounded, people don't stop to ask questions. But I don't think it follows that Billy Gee would tell any one what was in his saddlebags. You're dealing with a cold-blooded professional bandit, not a cocky amateur. He cached those bills——"

"I was going to say, Mr. Sangerly," broke in Tyler in his turn; "that we can't be too sure of this girl not knowing. Billy Gee's record shows that he's a damn fool with his money—that's what the men around camp say."

"After we have satisfied ourselves completely that the money cannot be found, it will be time enough to confront the girl, Tyler. It doesn't seem fair to me to accuse people who have opened their home to us of being accomplices of a criminal. Besides, Huntington is the man whom we have to thank for capturing Billy Gee. You might as well say that this rancher made a double cleaning—got away with the bandit's stealings and also collected the reward."

"That's the very thing that I'm thinking," declared Coates stoutly. "And I'm not so sure that the girl isn't mixed up in it, too. There's some awful slick people, even among these desert rats, Mr. Sangerly. It's funny how suddenly they got out of the country. It looks dog-gone suspicious to me."

Lex gazed thoughtfully across the room, at the picture of Mrs. Liggs.

"And supposing they're sweethearts, sir?" ventured Tyler. "In that case she'd be in on the game, and it'd be the easiest thing in the world for her to stow that twenty thousand dollars where nobody in God's kingdom'd find it. Another thing—Billy Gee, according to all reports, has either relatives or mighty close friends in Soapweed Plains."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, men," said Lex. "I'm going back to town to-night, and I'll ascertain all about Miss Huntington—if she has a sweetheart, the type of girl she is, and all about the family. In the meantime, drop the accomplice business and settle down to a systematic search."

It was dusk when Lex stopped his machine before Mrs. Liggs' store. He was a little surprised to find the place wide open. The show window was ablaze with lights, the little proprietress was bustling energetically about behind the counter. He also noticed that her cheeks were flushed, her eyes brilliant, and that she greeted him in high spirits.

"You're looking like old times, Mother Liggs," he cried as he came bounding into the place. "What's the cause of all the happiness?"

"A person can't be lonely all the time, can she, Lex?" she smiled. "I get awful blue sometimes, but I can be most awfully glad afterward."

There was no one in the store, so he leaned on the counter, lit a cigarette, and talked.

"We've been looking over the Huntington home, Mrs. Liggs, and I can't make out the

situation. In the first place, I want to ask you one question, because I know you are a very intimate friend of the family—I saw your picture occupying a place of honor out there. Has Miss Huntington a sweetheart? Have you ever known her to be interested in some man?"

Mrs. Liggs shook her gray head vigorously. "No, and, what's more, she never speaks of men in that way, Lex. She's different than any girl you've ever met, for her age—she's eighteen. She's studious and likes to read, and—well, dream. She sits and spins yarns to me every time we visit one another. Yarns she's made up, mind you, and they're as clever as any you ever read. But I'm sure she never kept company with any one in her life."

He looked away, thoughtfully, a moment. "The reason I ask, is that our investigations lead us to believe that she helped Billy Gee. From all indications, she even hid him in her room. I wanted to be sure about their relations to each other, for it is quite probable that if he knew her he would tell her about the money, and either confide in her where he had hidden it or have her conceal it for him." He followed by giving Mrs. Liggs a detailed account of the afternoon's search at the Huntington ranch.

His little old friend listened in silence, drinking in every word, a strange light that he did not note gleaming far back in her faded blue eyes.

"And if you don't find this money, Lex, I hope you don't intend to arrest Dot," she cried suddenly. "That would be a terrible outrage. That girl is a dear, innocent child who wouldn't do—— Why, that's just like her to help him!"

He smiled at her vehement defense of the girl.

"I don't think we will have occasion to go that far in the matter, Mrs. Liggs," he said. "As I was driving in from the ranch, it struck me that, confronted with what evidence we have, showing that Miss Huntington aided him, Billy Gee will confess rather than have her incriminated. Any man would." He paused, and added slowly: "Personally, I don't believe that a young lady of Miss Huntington's standing would stoop to such a thing. Am I right?"

Mrs. Liggs did not answer the question. She looked him straight in the face a few seconds, then she said gravely:

"You haven't seen the bulletin board this afternoon, have you? Well, Billy Gee escaped from Sheriff Warburton and—and got away, Lex."

A hundred miles southwest of Geerusalem, where the Mohave Desert grudgingly recedes and the great arable belt, rich in orange and lemon groves, orchard and vineyard, follows the coast line unswervingly to the distant south and north, a dozen posses were scouring the country for one man.

Four hours before, Billy Gee had turned on Sheriff Warburton in the lavatory of the smoking car, and struck him down with the heavy "bottle cuffs" that shackled his hands. He had taken the key from the unconscious officer's pocket, unlocked the manacles, slipped them on Warburton, and gagged him so he could not cry out. Then, he had leaped through the lavatory window, while the train was straining on the upgrade, out of the desert. At the next station, a brakeman had discovered the sheriff lying helpless on the floor.

The train was stopped, the wires tapped, and the alarm spread broadcast. Sheriff Warburton, overwhelmed with humiliation and rage, mustered a posse and began combing the neighborhood where the prisoner had broken for freedom. Other posses were organized. A dragnet, twenty-five miles in diameter, began closing in. Hour after fruitless hour passed. On the evening of the same day that he had left Geerusalem with the notorious bandit in custody, Sheriff Warburton, baffled, discomfited, offered one thousand dollars for the man's capture, dead or alive.

At ten o'clock that night, Warburton wrapped up his gold-filled star of authority together with his credentials and a letter, resigning as sheriff of San Buenaventura County. These he mailed to the chairman of the board of supervisors. But he did not abandon his hunt for Billy Gee. He prosecuted that hunt all the more vigorously; breathing a fearful vow against the outlaw, did they meet again.

Two weeks later, the newspapers carried a story about the finding of a dead man in a lone desert cañon, some distance from the little town of Burbank. Authorities differed as to the length of time the man had been dead. Identification proving quite impossible, it was, nevertheless, conceded that the remains were those of Billy Gee. Ex-Sheriff Warburton, alone, would not believe it.

CHAPTER X.

Dot Huntington found San Francisco to exceed her wildest imaginings of what a large city really was. She had always pictured it similar to an ant hill for life and activity, but never so spectacular, so dynamic in potentialities as that architectural vista which opened out before her eyes on that memorable morning when she and her father crossed the seven miles of green bay from Oakland, toward the horizon of buildings rising step on step, tier on tier, up the steep slopes of hills that hid their crests in a low, fleecy fog cloud.

And Market Street, with its surging streams of pedestrians and traffic, appalled her. The blockade of street cars, the thunder and shriekings of the busy Embarcadero, the seeming confusion of it all, bewildered her—and bewildered Lemuel far more.

It was during the period when the Golden West Hotel was to the country people of California what the Congress, in Chicago, is to the political world—the one and logical caravansary. Lemuel, then, set his blind course, for the Golden West Hotel. By some means or another they managed to reach this popular haven of rest and security, at that time located at Ellis and Powell Streets. They were shown to their little suite, sat down in the cozy parlor and stared at each other.

"My!" exclaimed Dot.

"Geerusalem ain't got nuthin' on this place, has it?" grinned Lemuel.

In the two days following their arrival, they devoted themselves almost entirely to getting acquainted with the vicinity of the hotel. Then they began to take little tours of investigation through the shopping district, growing bolder and bolder until they were promenading along the Grant Avenue fashion center, staring into the gorgeous display windows. Naturally enough, the main thought of Lemuel was to get his daughter an "outfit;" that daughter, like any woman, was not averse to looking at pretty things.

But by the end of the fourth day, it became quite apparent to them both that choosing a young lady's first wardrobe which would give her the required style and poise demanded by so select an institution as Longwell Seminary was not a job for the uninitiated. They sat down in their little parlor to study over the problem. Lemuel was smoking his after-dinner cigar, and frowning at his new tight shoes.

"I have it, daddy!" burst out Dot suddenly, breaking a long silence. "Telegraph to Mrs. Liggs, and ask her to come. You can pay her fare and expenses. You remember, she used to live in San José. She knows all about what is proper in dress. She can get somebody to take care of the store for a few days. I'm sure she'll come."

But Lemuel shook his head. "We don't want Mrs. Liggs picking out yore things, Dot," he said shortly.

"Why not? She's in the dry-goods business, and knows all about clothes."

"She's old-fashioned, that's why, an' she wouldn't talk to me——"

"She is not, daddy, and you know it," cried the girl. "Didn't she make me that pink dress last summer, and everybody admired it? I know that if we try to buy a wardrobe ourselves, they'll—— Well, we'll have to take what they tell us, because we don't know any better. You'll save money by having Mrs. Liggs come. Please send for her, daddy!"

They discussed it for an hour, and because her father's objections were weak and unconvincing, Dot argued all the more strenuously to have her way in the matter. Through it all, Lemuel was endeavoring to make up his mind whether he should tell his daughter how he had captured Billy Gee, or object flatly to Mrs. Liggs. It was certain that, did their little old friend come, she would lose no time in telling Dot the whole story. Again, her extraordinary treatment of him that morning when he rode into Geerusalem rankled him considerably. Of course, there was always the possibility that she had not recognized him, for Mrs. Liggs' sight was not as keen now as he had once known it to be, he told himself.

So, after long deliberation, he decided that since they were absolutely dependent on Mrs. Liggs to solve the wardrobe problem, he would tell Dot everything—except the fact that Billy Gee had threatened his life; for he would not awaken unnecessary fears in her lest she might refuse to attend school. He cleared his throat, presently, and said:

"I'm goin' to tell you somepin, Dot, an' I want you to forgive me for carin' more for yore future than for yore opinion of yore dad. I ketched Billy Gee, as he was leavin' the barn that night, an'—an' I c'llected the ten thousand dollars reeward."

She had been sitting on the arm of his chair, smoothing his thin, gray hair, with a gentle hand. Now, a hard gasp escaped her. She got up slowly, and came around in front of him, and stood looking sharply down into his face.

"You turned him over—over to Sheriff Warburton?" she said hoarsely.

"I did, Dot—to git the money to give you an edjucation. But—but he got away," he added, grinning at her.

"He got away! He got away—again—from Sheriff Warburton!"

"Yeh. An' they ain't bin able to ketch him. He's disappeared. I bin watchin' the papers."

She threw back her head, and laughed aloud—a silvery, daring laugh.

"I'm glad! Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried, a catch in her throat.

Lemuel was gazing narrowly at her, noting the color come and go in her cheeks. He had never seen such a brilliant light in her eyes before. He marveled.

"I ain't glad, that's sure," he said, at last, and chuckled hollowly. But the significance of his words was lost on her.

"Tell me about it, daddy. And you got all that money—and he's free? I'll forgive you, then."

Whereupon, he began an apologetic confession, recounting how he had followed her from the house on the night she went into the hayloft; how he had surprised Billy Gee and delivered him over to Warburton; how he had returned home by way of the field, and climbed into bed. Dot listened in silence, but she fairly gloated over the paper—which Lemuel had saved—giving the particulars of the outlaw's subsequent escape.

"You'll notice it says that the twenty thousand dollars he stole from the paymaster is missin'," said Lemuel pointedly. Her unusual interest in Billy Gee disturbed him.

She glanced up from her reading, and found him studying her in an odd way. She thought there was suspicion in his look—or was it craftiness, greed? The recollection of that wild outburst of his in their kitchen, back home, flashed into her mind. She couldn't be sure of him. Regardless of the fact that he now had money, might he still not be tempted—particularly since no one had the remotest inkling of the whereabouts of the outlaw's loot—to keep it, if she told him that Billy Gee had left it for her, and that she was only waiting an opportunity to return it to its rightful owners? It was a terrible thought, she knew, but she could not free herself from it.

"Don't you suppose they'll make a search for it, daddy?" she asked. There was curious interest back of the question, but he did not notice it, watching as he was for some sign of nervousness or apprehension in her face.

"They already started. A young feller named Sangerly—his old man's manager of the road—'s bin on the job sence the day we left. He's got a coupla deetectives along. 'Cordin' to what he was tellin' me, he aims to make it purty hot for somebody." He said this last significantly.

She laughed. "You don't mean that he suspects who has this money? That's——"

"He's got it figgered out that Billy Gee brought it to our place. When I deelivered him to Bob Warburton that mornin', he didn't have no more'n five dollars on him. Sangerly says he cached it on the ranch." He paused, and added: "You don't happen to know about it, do you, Dot? You must 'a' seen his saddlebags."

"Yes, he had his saddlebags," she replied, in even tones. "But when I asked him what was in them, he said simply that he always carried his mother's picture and some keepsakes along with him. He may have left them in the barn—forgotten them. Did you look?"

"No. I reckon Sangerly'll find them. I wisht I'd hunted around for 'em, now. But, anyhow, I'm glad you ain't goin' to git mixed up in this thing, hon. The papers'd print yore name, an' mebby yore pitcher'd git in, an'—jest think what a disgrace it'd be. Like as not, you'd have to quit school. Folks'd talk awful, you bein' c'nnected up with a bandit. An' no matter what you could say, wouldn't do no good." He looked at his watch, and rose to his feet. "All right, we'll send for Agatha. What'll we say?"

Between them they worded the telegram, Dot writing it; and, presently, he left the room bound for the hotel office.

Once alone, the girl began again her deliberations on what she should do with the treasure she carried wrapped in her mother's old silk shawl. It had become a source of worry and unrest with her. It had all seemed so easy on the train—merely the inconvenience of going to the police station, sheriff's office, or postmaster, turning the twenty thousand dollars over to one of the three,

with the information that the amount had been stolen by Billy Gee, the bandit, and that she wished it returned to the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad Company.

Now, however, amidst all this great city's bustle and confusion, she shrank from taking this step. On second thought, she was certain that she would be questioned closely; and there was just a possibility that she might be held as an accomplice. She had heard of just such things having been done. And, even as her father had said, there was the notoriety she was of a certainty to receive in the newspapers. Yes, everybody would believe that she was a friend of this man whose name stood for lawlessness. What, then, must she do—to save the romantic situation for herself?

Pondering the matter over, she hit on another solution. She would wait until Mrs. Liggs arrived. She would confide in the little old lady—tell her everything—and ask her advice. Mrs. Liggs would understand and help her.

CHAPTER XI.

On the day following Billy Gee's daring escape, Coates and Tyler, the railroad detectives, had temporarily abandoned their search for the suspected cache on the Huntington ranch, and motored away over the fifty-odd miles to the station of Mirage, backtracking the bandit's course to the distant grading camp where he had robbed the paymaster's car.

At Lex Sangerly's request, the Geerusalem constable detailed a number of deputies to guard the ranch against the possibility of Billy Gee's return; for, Sangerly was more convinced now than ever that the disappearance of the twenty thousand dollars centered about the Huntington place. The bandit—if alive—would come back after it.

The morning after Lemuel sent the telegram to Mrs. Liggs asking her to join him and Dot in San Francisco, the little dry-goods storekeeper had informed Lex, when he voiced his surprise at her trunks and baggage being loaded on a freight wagon, that she was leaving for the metropolis to be gone an indefinite period. A few days later, he learned that Mrs. Liggs had sold out her business. He wondered vaguely, regretfully, over this. It seemed to him that she might have told him.

Meanwhile, Coates and Tyler back from their painstaking investigation of the route Billy Gee had taken from the grading camp into Soapweed Plains, told Sangerly that, even as Warburton had declared, there was not the remotest likelihood that the bandit had hidden his stealings on the way. They had found that he had not dismounted once. This but strengthened the theory that the ranch was the site of hidden treasure. Again, the two detectives set to work, making an exhaustive hunt of the premises—ransacking the barn, rummaging the house from attic to cellar, plying the pick and shovel in every conceivable place where a man would be led to conceal a stolen fortune.

After a week of this, the two men talked the matter over between themselves. They decided that in all probability, Lemuel Huntington knew where the money was. They declared that while his daughter might have acted solely from humanitarian reasons in aiding Billy Gee, her father, doubtless, had not only collected the reward but had found and cunningly buried the loot. For, they argued, since Huntington had taken Billy Gee into custody so easily, he had been shrewd enough to watch the bandit's movements some time in advance. In which case, he would have known the location of the outlaw's cache and have done away with it against all possibility of finding.

But Coates and Tyler said nothing of this to Sangerly. They were of the opinion that Lex was altogether too lenient in his judgment of Huntington; that he was letting Huntington's hospitality "blind" stand in the way of his suspicions. So they resolved to take the initiative and, unknown to him, confront Lemuel on his return, charge him with criminal complicity, and frighten him into a confession. But inquiry of the man who was caring for the ranch during its owner's absence brought the information that, not only was he ignorant of Lemuel's whereabouts in San Francisco, but he had not the slightest idea when his employer would be back. Coates and Tyler continued their half-hearted search, waiting.

Meanwhile, Lex had likewise given the mysterious disappearance of his company's money considerable thought. He, also, had arrived at the conclusion that there was need of carefully questioning Lemuel or his daughter about the Billy Gee episode. While he did not believe that they were accomplices in any sense of the word, there was a chance that they might be able to throw some light

on the matter which would facilitate the hunt, resulting probably in the immediate location of the treasure's hiding place.

Since the departure of Dot and her father, Lex had made it his business to ascertain the standing of the Huntingtons, in order to satisfy his mind as to the type of persons they were. He had found that the community generally looked on Lemuel as a sterling character, and held Dot in no less esteem than did Mrs. Liggs. About the only weakness that the father had, so his friends had said, was education; and the consuming passion to have his daughter educated. This, to Lex's mind, was a sure sign of probity, of native genteelness that could not go far wrong.

One morning, two weeks after the Huntingtons had left for San Francisco, Lex motored into Geerusalem from the ranch. He had said nothing to Coates and Tyler about his contemplated action, merely instructing them to wait his return. Once in camp, he had the constable send a wire to the San Francisco chief of police asking him to locate if possible the hotel at which Lemuel and Dot were registered. Around four o'clock that afternoon a reply was received, designating the Golden West.

Without loss of time, Lex jumped into his machine and drove to the railroad, and caught the night train for the North. He had decided to have a quiet talk with these people. Besides this, he felt just a little bit curious to meet this girl of whom he had heard such flattering reports—whose picture he had looked on so many times during his fortnight at the ranch.

But it so happened that while Lex was en route to San Francisco, Lemuel—having sight-seen the metropolis to his entire satisfaction, as well as gratified the desire of his life by settling Dot in Longwell Seminary for her first year of educational instruction—was on his way back to Geerusalem, with a headful of plans calculated to make him, in the next decade, the principal cattle baron of southern California. Their trains passed each other in the night. The following day when Lemuel reached home, the railroad detectives, Coates and Tyler, confronted him and, insinuating that he had dispossessed Billy Gee of his twenty-thousand-dollar haul, started their grilling of him.

And because he could not give a convincing story of how he had known that Billy Gee was hiding in the hayloft—fearing as he did to mention even so much as his daughter's name in conjunction with the case—they arrested him on a John Doe warrant, after six hours of relentless questioning.

Though it had already grown dark, Coates rode to Geerusalem and communicated by telephone with Western Manager Sangerly of the M. & S., in Los Angeles. Following the usual legal formalities necessary to take a prisoner out of the section, Coates finally sped away for the ranch in a rented machine, his object being to get Lemuel safely lodged in the county jail before Lex returned. For, now, there was not the slightest doubt in the mind of these two sleuths that Huntington was the sensational catch of their careers.

It was a bright, starry night, warm and quiet, and it was nine o'clock, when the car came to a halt before the gate. Coates sprang out, and was presently pounding on the front door.

"Who's there? That you, Ray?" came Tyler's voice.

"Yes. What's the matter? Open up!"

The next moment, Coates stood inside gazing in amazement at his partner, grim of face, six-shooter in hand. Behind him was Lemuel, his sunburned leathery skin, yellow with alarm, his eyes glaring wildly.

"See anybody outside?" said Tyler.

The other shook his head. "Only the driver of the machine. What's stirring?"

"Come on in here, I want to show you something." Locking the door, Tyler led the way into the kitchen. He picked up a soiled discarded old envelope from the table. It was covered with lead-pencil scribble. He handed it to Coates, who read:

I jest cum to take my saddle an bags an pack off the 20,000 that you dicks aint bin able to find. After this better close the window so folks cant lissen. An dont show yore nose outside cos Im shootin tonite.

Coates looked at Tyler, and cursed.

"Billy Gee!" he said sententiously.

"Yes, damn him!" ground out Tyler. "A little while after you left, I heard a knock at the door. I thought it was you coming back. That's what I found shoved under the door." He indicated the envelope. "He's been taking in all our talk through that window, yonder. It was open—he says so."

Coates flared up suddenly. "He says he beat it with the swag, too. And you've stuck around here, and let him. What kind of a guy——".

"If you think I'm busting out after him so's he can pot-shot me, you've got another think coming," growled the other.

His partner paced the floor, raging silently. A few moments of this, then he halted in front of Tyler.

"We're in a pretty mess. I phoned the old man and got his O. K. to go ahead in the matter. Now, look at us! We've put in two weeks for nothing. The money's gone. Savvy, gone! We might as well grab our duds and report to headquarters for a damn nice reprimand." He turned to Lemuel standing near by, rubbing his bony hands in hopeless apprehension. "Huntington, you can stay on, here. But you're on probation, understand! And don't leave the country, till you hear from us. Come on, Tyler! We're going to town. We're through."

"Through?" cried the man. "Let's start out and make a hunt for Billy Gee. You've got the machine, and we can get on his track with the headlights——"

He broke off, interrupted by the furious honking from the waiting car, the hollow roar of its open muffler.

The two detectives started for the front door. As they sped down the garden walk, gripping their revolvers, the automobile leaped away, its headlights cutting avenues of white light through the darkness in the direction of distant Mirage. Alongside of the driver rose the silhouette of a man. He megaphoned back at the pair:

"Thanks for the machine, fellers. Give my reegards to law an' order."

Coates and Tyler emptied their six-shooters at the car. Cursing frantically, they sprang in pursuit, loading and firing their weapons as they ran. But the automobile, speeding forward like the wind, whirled out of range, and went on and on, vanishing into the desert night.

CHAPTER XII.

Dot Huntington was fascinated with Longwell Seminary as a place of learning, but resented the rigid rules which forbade her from enjoying many of the privileges to which she had been accustomed all her life; namely, going about at will unchaperoned, and the right to read any book that pleased her fancy.

A sudden ravenous appetite for education had seized her, however. Brought face to face with tomes of fact and instruction, she threw herself whole-heartedly into the work of mastering her lessons in order to attain that grade of erudition which her age and matureness of mind made necessary. In order to bring this about, Lemuel had made special arrangements that she take instruction from a private teacher, that she might go more rapidly forward.

But displeased as she was with the seminary's system of discipline, she was, on the other hand, deeply interested in its student body. She had never known the companionship of girls of her own age before, and here there were many of them, and no small number of daughters of the most prominent families of the West. Dot, having a prepossessing personality that attracted friends to her, made friends.

Had it not been for these vivacious newfound friends of hers and the engrossing interest she found in her studies, Dot would have known little if any peace of mind. For she was still the unwilling custodian of the white-elephant fortune in bills. Mrs. Liggs had not put in an appearance. She could not imagine what had happened to Mrs. Liggs that she did not so much as write.

Three days after Lemuel had wired their little old friend asking her to come to San Francisco, they had given up hope of hearing from her. Considerably mystified, they had been finally driven to the act of visiting the manager of one of the big stores, and confessing that Dot was going to a select seminary and needed a select wardrobe, the style of which they were wholly ignorant of. As a consequence, Dot was now the proud possessor of a wardrobe that matched anything in Longwell's.

But Mrs. Liggs' strange silence remained a mystery; and, accordingly, the twenty thousand dollars remained wrapped in the old silk shawl in Dot's room, which she shared with the daughter of a Portland, Oregon, shipbuilder. Let it not be assumed that Dot was unmindful of the ultimate disposition of this money. Rather was she decided that it would eventually find its way back to its rightful owners. The thing is, that her first nervousness had left her. Constant thought, on a subject of fearful moment, in due time robs that subject of its alarms.

She now reasoned that since Mrs. Liggs had failed to come—she was to have sought her friend's advice in the matter—she would wait until the time that she could get up sufficient courage to write to the Mohave &

Southwestern Railroad, and explain the situation in such a way as to protect herself from the possibility of subsequent newspaper notoriety. Then, one day, she remembered with a thrill of joy, Bob Warburton, her father's friend. Why had she not thought of Warburton, before? He was the very man who could and would return this ill-gotten treasure, and shield her.

It was late afternoon when the happy thought dawned on her. She was in her room and she sat down and wrote out a telegram to Warburton, asking him to come to San Francisco immediately, as she had something of urgent importance to tell him. Then she ran downstairs and out into the garden to an arbor in a far corner of the seminary grounds. On a small ledge beneath one of the rustic benches, among a mass of like clandestine correspondence, she placed the message and the money for the coachman, who, because of the handsome tips he enjoyed, was a strong advocate of strict academic rules against letter writing.

Dot hurried back to the building. As she came in sight of the front steps, she halted abruptly. Approaching them was a little old woman, dressed in a neat correct street dress. One glance, and the girl knew her for Mrs. Liggs. Calling her name in glad tones, she raced toward her.

"You, darling!" she cried. "Mrs. Liggs! Oh, I'm so glad! When did you come?" She caught the frail form in her strong young arms, and hugged and kissed her until the pale-blue eyes glistened with joy.

They stood on the seminary steps for a few minutes talking animatedly. It developed that Mrs. Liggs had come to the city a few days after she had received Lemuel's telegram, but had not been able to meet them because of an unforeseen development which had changed her plans. Inquiry at the Golden West Hotel later on, gave her Dot's whereabouts and she had called to have a quiet talk with her.

The girl led the way inside to one of the parlors, grim in its austere furnishings and scrupulous cleanliness. On one of the walls, in a black mahogany frame, the stern visage of one of the Longwell sisters gazed icily down on them. Authorization to conduct the Longwell Seminary as an educational institution was strikingly manifest in a framed parchment that bore the seal of the State of California, and a hundred words of beautiful handwriting that was painfully difficult to read under the most desirable conditions.

As they were about to seat themselves, a tidy maid made her noiseless appearance at the door and motioned to Dot.

"Something terrible has happened, Miss Huntington," she whispered to her. "Miss Longwell phoned the trustees and—they're holding a meeting in the office, now, about —about, whether to expel you or not."

"But, why?" gasped the girl. "I can't imagine——"

"It's something that's in the paper. I haven't been able to see it. Miss Longwell's taken all of them, and give us orders not to allow any more in the seminary."

Anxiety and bewilderment struggled in Dot's face. Her thoughts flashed to her father.

"There must be some mistake," she murmured half to herself, at last.

"I heard them mention your name, Miss Huntington," said the maid. "I tried to catch what it was about, but Miss Longwell closed the door. I'm so sorry."

Dot thanked her, and went back to Mrs. Liggs. The old lady was studying her narrowly.

"It's trouble, ain't it, Dot? I can see it in your face, so don't story to me, dearie. And it's about your father and Billy Gee, ain't it?"

The girl told her what the maid had said.

"Well, that's what it is—about Billy Gee and your dad," declared Mrs. Liggs. "The papers are full of it, and that's why I come to-day to see you."

"But what has happened?" cried Dot, pale and starting to tremble.

"Nothing. Just a whole lot of rot that them reporters glory to write about." Thereupon, she gave a detailed account of the first-page story dealing with Billy Gee's sudden appearance at the Huntington ranch, his daring escape in the railroad detectives' automobile. There followed an intimate report of Lemuel's arrest on suspicion of having appropriated the stolen funds of the M. & S. Railroad Company, and his subsequent release pending further investigation, as a result of the note written by the outlaw to the effect that he had dug up and made away with the twenty-thousand-dollar cache.

Dot listened attentively, an odd admiration that she could not subdue dancing in her eyes at this latest of Billy Gee's reckless

exploits. And even as her little old friend was speaking, she understood the reason for the outlaw's action—her father was suspected of theft, and Billy Gee had lied to save him. Billy Gee had lied to make wholly secure his twenty-thousand-dollar gift to her! Her heart beat fast. He had not forgotten—was not forgetting. He was magnificent in his outlawry.

"And, no matter how I've hated your dad, Dot, I know he never took that money," Mrs. Liggs was saying. "He's honest, and wouldn't——"

"You've hated him?" echoed the girl in surprise.

"I did, yes. But that's all passed now."

"Why, Mother Liggs! I thought you and father were such good friends."

The little old woman nodded uncertainly at the floor. The faint flush of excitement, which her cheeks had worn until now, vanished. Her gentle face was a trifle drawn.

"I've come to tell you something, honey—not because I want to, but he asked me to. I'm—I'm Billy Gee's mother, Dot." She had spoken in low, broken tones. She turned brimming eyes to the girl; her lips trembling. She watched with pathetic eagerness for a smile, almost like some penitent craving forgiveness. A painful pause fell.

"You're his mother?" repeated Dot slowly. She stared in almost unbelief at the withered, wistful old countenance. Then, a soft light crept into her eyes. She dropped on her knees beside Mrs. Liggs and gathered her close in her arms. "You're a wonderful mother, and—I'm so glad," she breathed tenderly. "Father didn't know it."

For the next fifteen minutes, Mrs. Liggs poured out her heart—the first time since the criminal career of her only child, Jerome, had darkened the future for her and filled her life with fears and heartaches. Sobbing, she told that tragic story; from that awful morning in Bakersfield, three years ago, when the police came to the Liggs home looking for Jerome—charged by City Treasurer Gene Miles with embezzlement of the city funds—up to the day of his capture by Lemuel Huntington.

And, even as any mother, she tried to excuse her wayward boy for everything he had subsequently done, by pointing out that the criminal authorities had hounded him and forced him to follow his desperate calling, as a means of living. Nor was she wholly wrong in the accusation, as any ex-convict will stoutly tell you. A penitentiary record is a full brother to guilt, in the eyes of the law's bloodhounds—though Billy Gee had never known the inside of a prison cell.

Mrs. Liggs was still speaking when a sharp rap sounded on the door. It was the maid, come to inform Dot that Miss Longwell, president of the seminary, wished to speak with her in the office. The girl thought for a moment, then, insisting that her little old friend accompany her, escorted her out of the parlor and down the spacious hall to another apartment, fitted with businesslike furnishings, including a large oak desk before which sat the head of the institution.

Miss Longwell was a most unattractive type of middle-aged person; haughty, self-contained, precision itself, and thin as a lath. She sat up rigid in her straight-back chair, and gazed at Dot through her shiny glasses; then she let her gimlet eyes rest on Mrs. Liggs. Lemuel's daughter returned the frigid look with a proud one of her own.

"Miss Huntington," began the preceptress; "I wished to talk to you privately."

"This is Mrs. Liggs," said Dot, by way of explanation, at the same time going through with the formalities of introduction, "and whatever must be said may be said in her presence. I think I know what you wish to tell me."

Miss Longwell's lips tightened. She hesitated, then got up and closed the door. She halted before them.

"I regret very much, Miss Huntington," she said in modulated tones, "that an unfortunate condition has arisen which makes it quite impossible for you to continue as a student of Longwell Seminary. Indeed, it distresses me greatly to have to make this fact known to you. Your conduct has been highly meritorious in the time that you have been here, and as to your application in the line of study—I make this without reservation—you have exceeded our best expectations. But——"

"What is this condition, you speak of, Miss Longwell?" broke in Dot.

"Why—er—it concerns your father. While I have not the slightest doubt that the—er—thing is simply a newspaper canard, still the long-standing reputation of Longwell Seminary as an institution of untarnished merit, cannot be jeopardized. Your father, Miss Huntington, I am very grieved to state, is accused of—of theft."

Dot flushed angrily. The manner of the speaker as she pronounced this last was refinedly insulting, she thought.

"But you have met my father, Miss Longwell. Do you think he's that kind of a man?" she asked quietly.

"To be frank with you, I don't. Still, as you must see, that does not alter matters. The mere accusation is so serious as to cast discredit on this institution, did we allow you to remain a member. This was the unanimous opinion of our board of trustees at a meeting this afternoon. Acting under its instruction, I am wiring your father. You will get your effects together, preparatory to leaving. I would add that I am extremely sorry, Miss Huntington——"

"I'm not!" interrupted Dot, her eyes glittering with a dangerous fire. "What's more, Miss Longwell, I do not care for your sympathy. I am glad that I have found out just how elevating a school of this kind really is. You don't help build up character. You're pleased to help ruin reputations. By sending me home, you tell the world that Lemuel Huntington is a thief. That I, his daughter, am his accomplice, and——"

"Dearie, you mustn't say such things," burst out Mrs. Liggs nervously.

"Miss Huntington, the interview is over," cried the preceptress, a flush mantling her prominent high cheek bones. "You will go to your room and await my orders."

"I am leaving your institution, madam, as soon as I pack my clothes. And you will kindly return me the remainder of my tuition fee before I go."

Reluctantly she allowed the placating Mrs. Liggs to escort her from the room and back to the parlor. And, thereupon, she arranged with her little old friend to stop with her until word could be gotten to Lemuel. Shortly afterward Dot left the seminary, the tuition fee in her purse, the sympathetic maid instructed to send the girl's baggage to Mrs. Liggs' home.

As they took their seats in a taxicab, another machine came to a stop on the opposite side of the street. The lone passenger in the tonneau stared after the taxicab now whirling away down the street. It was Lex Sangerly, who ascertaining at the Golden West Hotel that Dot's trunks had been checked out to Longwell Seminary, had come to visit the girl, in the hope that she might be able to throw some light on the mysterious disappearance of Billy Gee's twenty-thousand-dollar haul. From which it may be deduced that he had not read the sensational newspaper story that day, incriminating Lemuel Huntington in the affair. Just now, he gazed in amazement at the taxicab speeding rapidly away.

"By George! If that isn't Mrs. Liggs, I'll——" He cut short his muttering, leaned over and spoke to the driver. The next moment he had started in pursuit of the pair.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Agatha Liggs occupied a little four-room cottage in the residential Richmond District. A tidy garden flanked and fronted it. Six blocks away the waves of the blue Pacific lapped a narrow stretch of beach under the shadow of crumbling shale cliffs. The Presidio fortifications loomed here and there along the heights.

Dot and her old friend having dismissed the taxi were just going in the gate when Lex's machine drew up. He shouted out a merry greeting to Mrs. Liggs.

"You should know that I don't intend to lose you again, Mother Liggs," he chided her, as he stopped before them. "That was a heartless way to treat a fellow—not even to tell me you were selling out your business. I followed you all the way from the seminary."

"It was so sudden, Lex, that I——" she began, with a pathetic little smile. "This is Mr. Sangerly, Dot. You've heard me speak of Miss Huntington, Lex."

"I surely have," he said, bowing. "Mrs. Liggs has said some very splendid things about you, Miss Huntington. It's a great pleasure to meet you."

Here Mrs. Liggs briefly explained how the Sangerlys had once been neighbors of hers in San José, mentioning among other things his shocking capacity for pumpkin pie when a boy. Laughing, they entered the house and Lex was ushered into the parlor. While Mrs. Liggs bustled about in the kitchen—for they must have a cup of tea, she announced quite decisively—Dot joined him and they began talking.

Yes, he had heard that she was attending Longwell Seminary. And she had been informed that his father was western manager of the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad. They talked on for some time. He admitted to himself that she was a charming girl, indeed; that she had a broad, sen-

timental strain in her make-up, and mental accomplishments that he knew did not spring from Lemuel's side of the house. But he couldn't forget that the daughter of the steamship company's president, whose guest he was during his stay in San Francisco, was also charming—most charming.

Yet, somehow, he did not seem to be able to explain his mission to this girl. He shied at deliberately cross-examining her in connection with a robbery. She was too obviously not that type of girl. After a while, he contrived to turn the conversation to Billy Gee. And he noted a new interest flash up into her eyes. It puzzled him.

"Perhaps, I'm biased, Miss Huntington, because of my association with the M. & S., but nothing would make me happier than to hear that he was in a San Quentin dungeon for life, or shot down by a posse," he said slowly, in answer to her question as to his opinion of the outlaw's exploits. "Rather brutal, isn't it?"

"Altogether brutal, Mr. Sangerly," she replied frankly. "But, then, I'm also biased. I owe him considerable." She paused, meeting his eyes. There was sincerity in her look. "If my father had not captured him and gotten the reward, I wouldn't be in San Francisco, with the opportunity of an education before me—the chance of seeing something outside of Soapweed Plains and Geerusalem all my life. I am candid in telling you these things. They're true." Her expression changed. "Sometimes the thought sickens me. It's like blood money."

He broke into a merry laugh. "Why, if any of us were to stop and consider the history of the dollar, Miss Huntington—the grief, misery, degradation, filth that each dollar has been the means of causing—we'd be too nauseated to have it around."

"There may be something in that, but in my case the evidence is right before me. To me, it's just like selling a soul. I'm deeply indebted to Billy Gee——"

"Bosh!" cried Lex. "He's a lawbreaker—a dangerous desperado. He robs men, seizes other men's belongings, appropriates to himself what isn't his, threatens men's lives to do it. Anybody who captures such an animal, Miss Huntington—who rids the world of such an animal—deserves far more than your father received from the M. & S." He had spoken bruskly, animated by a conscientious detestation of criminals in any form. She was watching him in an odd way. "The only regret I have," he added, "is that he had to die. I would rather see such a man wearing out his soul in prison."

"He's dead—did you say? Why, father wrote me that Mr. Warburton was of the opinion that——" A faint smile hovered about her lips—a tantalizing smile.

"If Billy Gee were alive," he broke in, "we would have heard from him long ago. Isn't it significant that our trains have not been robbed since the day of his capture? Billy Gee was a bred-in-the-bone crook, Miss Huntington—the type that never reforms. He died out on the desert."

The girl did not reply. Her mind went back to the night she had parted with Billy Gee in the dark hayloft—when he had said:

"You're goin' to hear from me, Miss Huntington—some time." It was the sound of his voice, the way he had said it, that remained ever vivid in her thoughts. To-day she had met the mother of Billy Gee!

At this juncture Mrs. Liggs entered the parlor to announce that luncheon was ready. As Lex followed her into the little dining room, Dot lingered to take her suit case into the bedroom. She joined them presently, and without a word laid the fat roll of currency, which she had taken from the silken folds of her mother's old shawl, before him.

A heavy silence fell. The two women were watching him. He stared in blank astonishment at the yellow-and-green wad for a long moment.

"What's this—— Is it possible, Miss Huntington, that——" He floundered awkwardly.

"These are the actual bills—the exact amount—that your company lost, Mr. Sangerly—twenty thousand dollars," said Dot, in even tones. "I am returning it to you for Billy Gee. Now, I wish you would free my father from the ridiculous charge that your detectives have made against him. If there has been an accomplice in this matter——" She paused, then went on with a smile: "I'll tell you the facts and let you judge for yourself. First, to set your mind at rest—Billy Gee is alive."

CHAPTER XIV.

It seldom happens that a sheriff ever regains his popularity once he loses a prisoner of such recognized badness as was Billy Gee. Somehow, it is difficult for the voter to believe that a really efficient official may

be caught unawares and outwitted by a criminal. So the conscientious wielder of the franchise goes to the polls and on the strength of his theory that a sheriff should never make a mistake, ousts the incumbent candidate in favor of the untried timber on the ballot.

The voters of San Buenaventura County, California, were of another sort, however. Sheriff Bob Warburton had proved up to their ideals for two terms—even if he hadn't been able to hold onto the elusive bandit of the Mohave. He was sincere, always on the job, a good fellow, dependable. That he had "slipped," once, should not condemn him, asserted the citizenry. What man does not slip, once?

Regardless of the fact that Warburton had resigned his office and that his political enemies made a great to-do, the people went to the polls strong for Warburton and reinstated him to office by an avalanche vote. On the very day that he resumed his gold star he issued a press statement in which he vowed to capture Billy Gee and get him the maximum sentence—imprisonment for life.

It was a week after election. During that week, Warburton had received Dot's telegram asking him to come to San Francisco. On the following day, while he debated whether he should make the trip or wire her for particulars, he got an unexpected message from Lex Sangerly, stating in so many words that the M. & S. money had been recovered, and urging the fact be kept secret. Warburton pondered over the matter. He began to wonder if it wasn't just possible that there was a little clandestine love affair between Dot and Billy Gee. He readily arrived at the conclusion, owing to his knowledge of Lex's movements in the case, that the latter had gone to interview Dot and found that she had the money; this last would also explain her telegram to him that she had something of importance to say to him. Love, alone, could have moved Billy Gee to part with twenty thousand dollars.

It was at a season of the year when the desert country of southern California was beginning to feel the atmospheric influence of the first sprinkle of rain descending on the timbered highlands to the north.

Unknown to any member of his office, except his lieutenant, Under-Sheriff Hodgson, Sheriff Warburton left the county seat one night on a still hunt of weeks.

Now, any man familiar with the man-hunting game will tell you that if there is one thing an officer of the law never forgets, it is an injury received at the hands of a prisoner; also that he never forgives himself for losing a prisoner. Either is a professional disgrace. Sheriff Warburton was no exception to the rule. Had Billy Gee held him up at the point of a gun and stripped him of his valuables, the act would have been quite forgetable alongside of striking him down, shackling him, and making his escape.

The memory of that hurt had grown on Warburton—permeated him like some vicious poison. His thirst to capture Billy Gee came to be a mania with him; a mania similar in intensity to that which had gripped Lemuel Huntington to see Dot educated before he died.

To-day, Sheriff Warburton was out to "get" Billy Gee—not Billy Gee dead, but Billy Gee alive. He wanted to bring the bandit into the county seat of San Buenaventura, so that the people might see that he had lived up to their trust and confidence in him. Anybody could sneak up to a desperado and shoot him. Few had courage enough to confront that desperado, and take him alive. Warburton was going to bring Billy Gee "into camp," alive. So, he vowed to himself at the time.

Straddle of a mule, driving a pack burro before him, went the grim sheriff of San Buenaventura County, looking for all the world like a prospector in his patched-up overalls, old gray hat, and boots worn down at the heels. A rough mat of whiskers which he had let flourish unshaved, disguised his features against the likelihood of recognition. Setting out from Burbank, he steered a little north of east and began a systematic visit to water hole, spring, and "tank," on his way across the north rim of the Mohave Desert. There were few of these blessed oases, and many hopeless miles separated them. A man could not live in that realm of suffocation and barrenness without water, and Warburton knew it.

Toward the end of August—a few weeks after Billy Gee's spectacular get-away from the Huntington ranch in the rented car that was to have borne Lemuel to the county jail—Warburton reached Blue Mud Spring, a forlorn, seldom-visited trickle of water lost in a topsy-turvy hill country some three miles west of Lemuel's quarter sections.

Warburton camped here four whole lonesome days, waiting. He had found a rather significant clew, as he thought.

Recently carved on the flat surface of a blue lime bowlder, a few yards away from the spring, was the legend, "Dot H., July 20, 1910." It had been done by a man, the work of an idle jackknife. The date was the one on which Warburton had trailed Billy Gee to the Huntington place. It was the one on which the bandit had met Dot. Inspection of the ground back of the bowlder showed that the man had lain there for some time. There was the imprint of a cartridge belt in the dirt; a short distance up the shallow gulch, his horse had pawed up the gravel, in a moment of hunger or impatience.

On the evening of Warburton's fourth day of lonely vigil, while he was cooking his supper prospector-fashion, the first person he had seen since leaving the railroad hove in sight from around a bend in the gulch. The sheriff recognized him. It was none other than Tinnemaha Pete. He came pattering forward, driving his two shying little burros before him, urging them onward with wild falsettoed cries. As he neared the muddy seepage of spring, he shooed them over to drink and pattered up to Warburton.

"Howdy, stranger!" he greeted. "Kinder sulkry weather, we're havin'." He squinted curiously at the sheriff, but did not know him.

"It is," said Warburton. "You're jest in time for a feed. Where're you headed?"

"I got claims over the hills, yonder," waving his skinny arm toward Geerusalem. "Sometimes I come here, sometimes I go on into camp for water. Prospectin'?"

Warburton nodded. "Lookin' for rock with one eye, an' watchin' for Billy Gee with the other. 'Tain't pleasant."

Tinnemaha Pete broke into a wild cackle. "That boy's a cat for lives, an' a fox for tricks. He's showed up ag'in. Ain't you heerd? Lordy! He's writ another notice, an' stuck it up on the blackboard of the *Searchlight*. Night afore last. 'I'm glad my old friend, Sheriff Warburton, is back on the job—I mean it.' That's what the notice said. Ain't that the tantalizin' young devil?" Tinnemaha's old eyes snapped proudly.

Warburton's teeth set under their cover of beard. He turned the smoking bacon.

"One of these days the sheriff'll git him —you jest watch," he replied slowly. "An' when he does——"

"If he does," grimaced the old man, "he's a jim-dandy. If it hadn't bin for Lem Huntington——"

He broke off in his eccentric way, and began throwing the loads off his two burros. Soon he had hobbled them for the night, and was back at the fire helping himself to a plateful of food. The next hour was devoted to eating and casual conversation. When the tinware had been washed and stacked away in a kyack and the two men had lighted their pipes, Sheriff Warburton returned to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"You seem to know c'nsiderable about Billy Gee, dad," he said. "If it hadn't a-bin for this man Huntington gettin' the bandit, the sheriff wouldn't——"

"Lem Huntington's a ornery skipjack," cried Tinnemaha in sudden fury. "He togs up like a greaser ranchero, an' smokes seegars now—an' has bought a lot of cows an' planted forty acres of lucern grass. I know, stranger! They can't fool old Tinnemaha Pete. Leetle Miss Dot hid out Billy Gee, an' her dad nabbed him for the reeward. The scorpion!"

It had grown quite dark; the purple sky was brilliant with stars; a warm, fragrant breeze purred down upon them over the broken crests of the rocky hills. In the leaping blaze of the camp fire, Tinnemaha's wizened face was distorted with senile rage. His short-stem pipe trembled in his bony hand.

"You ain't ever met Billy Gee, eh?" he asked. "I met him. I know him. They ain't a finer boy, no place, they ain't. An' along comes this Lem Huntington——"

"How d'you know that Miss Huntington hid Billy Gee?" said Warburton casually. "You're mebby jest guessin' at it, eh?"

"Guessin'!" shrilled Tinnemaha Pete. "Guessin', yore gran'mother. Mrs. Liggs told me, an' I figger she oughter know."

"Why?"

"Cos—well, Lem Huntington told her, that's why. Wait till him an' me tangle. I found mineral on his ground an'—cuss him, he'd better not try no shenanigans with old Tinnemaha. Mark ye, stranger! I'll cut him up. Sure'n scat, I'll cut him up!"

The desertarian mumbled wildly into his scraggy beard. Warburton leaned over and threw a piece of sagebrush on the fire. As the flames leaped up, he glanced at his odd

little companion. He contemplated him for a long moment, then he said:

"You reckillect the time las' summer when Billy Gee nailed that other notice on the *Searchlight's* bulletin board, sayin' he'd bin huntin' for Warburton for three year, an' ——" Tinnemaha brightened suddenly and laughed. "Well, the sheriff told me that he got a-hold of that paper notice," continued Warburton. "It 'pears like it was a fancy sort o' wrappin' paper, an' Warburton mosied 'round Geerusalem till he found the store that used that pertickler kind. It was a dry-goods store, run by Mrs. Agatha Liggs. The sheriff didn't do nuthin' about it then, figgerin' that Billy Gee might a-jest bought suthin' there an' used the paper to write on. Now——" He paused. Trained in reading men's minds by their change of facial expression, he had been quick to note the sudden look of suspicion which came over Tinnemaha's puckered features. He followed up his advantage with a wild guess. "What is Mrs. Liggs to Billy Gee, aunt or mother?"

The old man chuckled mirthlessly. He took a brand out of the fire and lit his pipe.

"I ain't ever goin' to tell you, stranger. I don't know. Mark ye! I don't keep cases on other folks' business. Ol' Tinnemaha Pete's got too much of his own to look after. Am I right or wrong—what?"

"Aunt or mother, dad?" smiled the sheriff indulgently. "Come on, now, you ain't foolin' me one bit. I've heerd for years as how Tinnemaha Pete knows most everything on the Mohave——"

"The hell you say!" croaked the desertarian. He thrust his skinny neck across the fire, gluing his rheumy eyes on Warburton's whiskered face. "I don't reckillect ever seein' you. What's yore name?"

"Jack Sangerly," lied Warburton.

"Spangaree? Seems to me I met—— Yessir! Agatha give me a knockdown to a dude feller. That's the name—Spangaree. But he was a ol' friend of the fambly, she said."

"My brother, Lex," was Warburton's bland reply. "Lex's bin edjicated in Frisco, an' I reckon he met her there. Come to think of it, I b'lieve he did say that she was Billy Gee's mother." He nodded gravely at the flames; but he was watching the queer little old man, hawklike.

Tinnemaha Pete hooted as at a good joke.

"'Tain't like yore brother to lie to you, is it, Spangaree?" he said, and resumed a vigorous puffing at his pipe. Thus for a few moments, then he added: "But Agatha knowed the whole Spangaree fambly, an' said as how the dude feller I met an' Jerome was kids together——"

"Jerome—Liggs!" gasped Warburton. He remembered the Bakersfield robbery!

Tinnemaha Pete did not hear him. His faded blue eyes, now snapping with malicious fire, were riveted on him.

"If you're a deteckitive, stranger, the Lord help ye!" he went on. "Billy Gee hangs out here. He might be out in the dark, yonder, takin' it all in. Close yore trap. Mark what I say!" He spoke in a heavy cracked whisper, and Warburton cast a cautious eye about the vicinity.

It was black night beyond the small circle of firelight; the neighborhood tragically still; a subtle warning in this funny little old man's voice and manner. A short silence fell. Tinnemaha Pete broke it with a rough chuckle, nodding over his pipe.

"But he ain't," he ruminated, half to himself. "Lem Huntington knows where he is. Gol-ding him! I hope Billy cuts him up, like I aim to. Jest let him try robbin' me of the Billy Geerusalem claim, an' I'll fetch him. I'll cut him up."

He mumbled on for a spell, then dropped off to sleep. Warburton waited a few minutes. He got cautiously to his feet, saddled the mule, and struck out for the Huntington ranch. Tinnemaha Pete had given him enough of a clew to go on. The fugitives Jerome Liggs and Billy Gee were one and the same.

CHAPTER XV.

As has been said Geerusalem was the Mecca of that gregarious creature, the "wildcatter"—scoundrelly gentlemen who flourish by selling worthless blocks of fabulous mining stock to gullibles and trusting innocents in far-away places. To-day, they were a power in Geerusalem; a formidable coterie of diplomatic gangsters, quite well organized, their strength more greatly accentuated through the medium of emissaries from the camp's underworld, paid to do the dirty work of the fraternity.

Earlier, on the same day of Warburton's meeting with Tinnemaha Pete, it had come to the ears of Jule Quintell, mining promoter,

and recognized leader of the wildcat element, that Tinnemaha Pete had discovered a rich gold ledge on Lemuel Huntington's ranch. Investigation proved that the ledge was a bonanza; that the hill on the west end of the Huntington place carried at least three parallel lodes that apparently were a continuation of the Geerusalem mineral belt. Tinnemaha Pete's location notices were made out in the names of Pete Boyd and Jerome Liggs.

Jule Quintell and his confederates held a two-hour meeting. Quintell, a cunning, unscrupulous individual, big in stature, aggressive, forty-four, and blond as a Scandinavian, presided over that meeting. It was not a matter of buying out Tinnemaha Pete and Jerome Liggs, with them. The fraternity knew that the locators had no legal claim to their discovery. Lemuel Huntington owned the ground. Lem used to hobnob with the crowd before he captured Billy Gee and got a start in the world.

The new strike held out phenomenal promises. The Geerusalem mines were established producers—rich as mints. A sister camp on the same mineral belt, only four miles distant, meant its owners would be millionaires overnight. The coterie realized this; also, that Lemuel Huntington must not so much as surmise that there was a pennyweight of gold ore on his land. They set to work, quickly, ruthlessly, to get possession of the bonanza ground for a song.

The meeting was held in Jule Quintell's private office in the Brokers' Exchange Building, a three-story clapboard building that housed the elaborate publicity and advertising departments—so essential to successful wildcatting—of three of Geerusalem's most prominent "promoters." As his confederates were preparing to depart, Quintell said:

"I'll have a report by midnight, to-night. We'll have him cinched by to-morrow, and I'll rush a gang of the double-fisted element out there to attend to Tinnemaha Pete and this Jerome Liggs—whoever he is. By the way, does anybody know where Huntington's daughter is staying in Frisco? Well, no matter. I'm going to cover all points. If the beggar don't come through decent, I'm giving him the limit."

After they were gone, Quintell sat back in his swivel chair and began glancing through a fistful of that day's mail. He halted over one letter, frowned at it a moment, and pressed the buzzer under the edge of his desk. That letter bore the signature: "Lex Sangerly, Division Superintendent, M. & S. R. R. Co." The door leading into the outer offices opened, and a tall, hawk-eyed, middle-aged man entered.

"Harrison, how about this?" snapped Quintell, handing over the Sangerly letter. "Look at the date! It's ten days since we received——"

"Permit me, Mr. Quintell," broke in Harrison. "You instructed me to file it, pending receipt of certificates of record from the county recorder. They came to-day, sir. The surveyors will complete their work, this afternoon, I understand. The only thing remaining to be done is to make out papers of incorporation of the Lucky Boy Placer Company."

"Start that immediately—rush it. On your way out, Harrison, send in a stenographer to take dictation."

"Pardon, Mr. Quintell," hesitated the man. "But if you intend to answer Mr. Sangerly's letter—— You were in conference here, and I wouldn't disturb you. He's out there, waiting to speak with you."

The promoter stared. "Sangerly?"

"Yes, sir."

A curse escaped Quintell. His hard eyes played thoughtfully about the room for a few moments. They rested on Harrison's face finally.

"I want them to find gold on the Lucky Boy, understand?" he said in slow, harsh tones. "I want you to go out there this evening, see? You know the vicinity of the proposed right of way. Salt it! This thing must be done thoroughly, Harrison. Salt it, in patches, on either side of the bench marks. Mark those patches. When I take Sangerly out there in the morning, you'll be along. You will take samples of the ground. Those samples must wash gold, understand? I'm leaving this to you, Harrison. If we put over this deal you get one thousand dollars' bonus and a salary increase. But there must be no slip, savvy?" He rose from his seat, and took from a large safe in the opposite side of the room a wide-mouthed bottle holding between three and four ounces of placer gold. "Here's the salt. Use it all, if you have to. You have your instructions. Now, show him in."

Harrison bowed silently, stuffed the bottle into his pocket and left the room. When Lex Sangerly appeared some seconds after, he found Quintell deeply engrossed in his

mail. The promoter greeted him warmly, waved him to a chair.

"I would like to apologize to you, Mr. Sangerly, for a regrettable oversight on the part of my secretary in not calling my attention to your letter, until to-day," began Quintell.

"It's quite unnecessary," said Lex. "The fact of the matter is, I have been away from the office since I wrote you." He paused. "To get down to business, I see that your surveyors are going ahead—that you seem disposed to block construction of a branch line into this camp."

"Discourage the coming of the railroad!" cried Quintell. "Why, Mr. Sangerly, I'm not a madman! I want the railroad. It spells progress, greater industry, greater opportunity——"

Lex nodded. "'Mr. Quintell, my father —the western manager of the road—instructed me to speak with you quite plainly on the matter. To begin: every landowner along the entire fifty-three miles of proposed line—from the station of Mirage to this camp —has granted us the privilege of a right-of-way for the asking. Coöperation has been extended to us on every hand. We were encouraged and proceeded with construction.

"To-day we are confronted with the fact that an old, abandoned group of claims, the Lucky Boy, has come suddenly to life. They are located across the mouth of the gulch, cutting off approach to a terminal in this camp. We have learned that you and seven other men have just filed on them as placer ground. Now, the point is, do you gentlemen intend to grant us the same right-of-way privilege that we have been receiving, or are you out to hold us up?"

It was a blunt question, but Quintell laughed it away in his gayest manner.

"My dear Mr. Sangerly! You don't seem to understand the situation from my viewpoint. In much the same way, not being a railroad man, I cannot fully appreciate your system of reasoning. What would you say if I told you that the Lucky Boy group is one of the richest placer-gold deposits discovered in this State, in recent years?" He was standing before his visitor, his hands thrust into his pockets, his shrewd eyes fixed hard on Lex. "Of course," he qualified, "when I say the richest, don't mistake my meaning—indications are such as to leave no doubt that gold is there in large quantities."

Lex regarded him in silence for a spell.

"How long since you made this discovery?"

"About two weeks ago. We've been keeping it quiet. We've had men looking up the records, to be certain that we were not going up against a hang-fire title, and subsequent litigation. To-morrow we're giving the news to the world. You may doubtless realize our reluctance, therefore, in complying with your company's request for permission to lay tracks across these claims. The ground is too valuable, we believe. Frankly, it is a question of money with us, Mr. Sangerly. But we are not trying to hold you up, as you called it."

Lex lit a cigarette reflectively. He frowned at the ornate rug on the floor. Quintell watched him.

"Of course, if my company desired a right of way across the Lucky Boy bad enough, you would extend it the privilege of purchase—for a reasonable figure?" said Lex, at last. "You just declared the railroad an asset to the camp."

"In view of the fact that my partners and myself have interests here that would be indirectly benefited by better transportation facilities, yes—we would consider such a purchase."

"Approximately, what would it cost us to lay tracks over this ground, Mr. Quintell? I would like to get immediate word to my people."

The promoter rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He said:

"The price would be based on the valuation per cubic yard of pay dirt over which the roadbed must of necessity have to pass. This strip, you can readily see, would be lost to development. Samples of the ground would be taken and a thorough assayer's test made to ascertain its average gold-bearing value. On the whole, Mr. Sangerly, I believe that we would give you a better deal than you suppose."

Lex rose to depart. "In my opinion, you should encourage this branch line rather than place an obstacle in the way of its building. At best it is only a venture, depending entirely on the continued prosperity of Geerusalem. And it is costing more per mile than any strip of road the company has constructed in years. I'd like to look over your placer ground, Mr. Quintell. When would it be convenient for you?"

"I was about to suggest that you come

here about, say ten o'clock, to-morrow morning. A party of us are motoring down there, and I'd be happy to have you accompany us," said Quintell genially. "Allow me also to extend to you the hospitality of my home, Mr. Sangerly. The hotels are abominable. I have an extra room and all the conveniences, including a Chinese cook."

"That's a rare treat in this region, and I'd snap it up, if it weren't for the fact that I am pretty comfortably fixed at the Huntington ranch," said Lex.

Quintell's eyes opened, in genuine surprise. "Well! So you're a friend of old Lem's, too? There's a fine type of Westerner for you, Sangerly. By the way, how is Miss Dot getting on with her education?"

"Remarkably well. She's taken up a number of special summer courses at the University of California and is forging right ahead, so her father tells me." He paused, and with a smile—"She's bent on immortalizing Geerusalem and Soapweed Plains. She's writing a novel."

"A novel?" echoed Quintell.

"Nothing less, and on no more interesting a personage than Billy Gee, the bandit. There are other notables in the story, myself, yourself, the wildcat bunch, Mrs. Agatha Liggs who used to keep the little dry-goods store, Sheriff Warburton, and a lot of others. I'll wager she'll sell five thousand copies in this section, alone. Besides, my company is going to use it for advertising purposes."

Quintell looked pleased. "I'll take a hundred myself. Your mention of Mrs. Liggs reminds me—do you happen to know if she's related to a Jerome Liggs?"

Lex stopped in the act of putting on his hat. The promoter saw the odd look that rose in his eyes.

"Jerome was her son," he said slowly. "Why do you ask?"

"Do you mean, he's dead?" countered Quintell. But his manner was plainly skeptical, and Lex noted it.

"That's what I understood. Have you heard ——"

"Oh, no! I happened across an old transaction in which the name was mentioned, that was all," lied the promoter.

But Sangerly did not believe him. As he walked out of the building, he thought over the incident and decided to reopen the subject with Quintell in the morning. Could Mrs. Liggs have deceived him in regards to Jerome's death? He remembered that she had never mentioned his name since the day he had met her at the store.

Still thinking, he entered the office of the Miners' Hotel and called for his mail. A copy of that day's *Searchlight* lying on the desk caught his eye. His bewilderment grew as he read the two-inch double-column of black-face type, announcing the unconfirmed rumor that "Tinnemaha Pete" Boyd and Jerome Liggs, prospectors, had made the sensational gold strike of the year. The account, following the usual method of all dailies to swell their sales, was striking to the eye but hazy as to details, hinting merely that the new bonanza was situated in the range southwest of camp.

Following Sangerly's departure, Quintell sat and reflected moodily for some time.

"It might just be that this Tinnemaha Pete entered the name in the location notice instead of the mother's," he muttered to himself. "Sangerly says, he's dead. Well, nothing like being sure." He reached for a pencil and began to write:

> Jerome Liggs wanted for robbery of Bakersfield city treasury three years ago is operating claims on Lemuel Huntington ranch near this camp.

He left the jot unsigned and rang for Harrison. When that individual appeared, he handed it to him.

"Wire that to Sheriff Warburton, at the county seat. See that it can't be traced back to us," he said. "And don't forget that little job you have at the Lucky Boy, Harrison. I'm driving out to Huntington's about eight. I might stop for you on my way in."

CHAPTER XVI.

Lemuel Huntington ate supper alone. He did not expect Sangerly back from Geerusalem until late. After he had washed the dishes, he lighted the lamp, got out a tablet and envelopes and, sitting by the kitchen table, proceeded to write Dot a long, cheerful letter. There was considerable to tell her. He must notify her that Lex was making the ranch his headquarters; that the Geerusalem branch of the Mohave & Southwestern was due to pass in front of the ranch; that he had sold four tons of alfalfa; that her pet cow, Bess, was a proud mother; that Warburton had been reëlected sheriff.

He began laboriously putting all this down. It was a quiet, warm night. The pen scratched and scratched. The patient old

clock tick-ticked, on and on, tirelessly. A contented bullfrog out in the cool garden began a hoarse pæan, and stopped. Lemuel put aside his second page—started a third. Suddenly, he heard the knob of the kitchen door squeak. He looked at it, and saw it moving—turning. His heart quickened. He remembered that he had not turned the key. He got to his feet to get his rifle standing in a far corner of the room. Then, the door opened and a man holding a six-shooter on him stood inside. The intruder shut the door, locked it.

"Pull down the shades, Huntington!" he commanded quietly.

Lemuel gazed at him, horror growing in his eyes. It was Billy Gee! Arrived at last, was the moment he had so dreaded. Again, there came to his ears the bandit's threat, made that eventful morning in Warburton's room. He grew faint with fright. Tremblingly, he obeyed the man's orders.

"Sit down!" directed Billy Gee. He waited until the rancher had complied, then he drew a chair up to the table. Lemuel watched him, horrified.

And it struck him that his Nemesis was not displaying any of the usual signs of rage and hatred that he believed should forecast revenge. He thought the outlaw seemed rather friendly disposed, notwithstanding the steely glitter in his eyes. At any rate, he told himself, the fellow looked well-fed, well-groomed—handsome, indeed, compared to that half-dead wretch he had delivered to Bob Warburton that never-to-be-forgotten morning.

"What're you shakin' about?" asked Billy Gee. "I had an idee you was gritty, the way you acted that day you herded me into camp." He grinned, and restored his six-shooter to its holster. "I promised I'd make you pay, Huntington. I ain't forgot it. But it ain't time yet. I jest come in to have a leetle chat with you. I see Lex Sangerly is stoppin' here with you."

Lemuel nodded. "What d'you want? I'm busy. I'm—I'm willin'," he burst out nervously.

"I hear Miss Dot is doin' fine at the university," said the other, with a glance at the letter. "I wish you'd give her my reegards. You've got a lady for a daughter, Huntington."

A short, painful silence fell. Lemuel fidgeted in his seat.

"What did them two railroad detectives do the time I run off with their automobile?" asked the unwelcome visitor presently.

"Nuthin'. They left here nex' day. Of cou's', they was sore. I—I oughter mebby thank you for doin' me a favor. They was goin' to arrest me."

Billy Gee laughed softly. "I heerd 'em talkin'. Miss Dot turned the money back to Lex Sangerly, didn't she? I'm glad she did, now." He shifted his chair closer, leaned on the table, and gazed hard at Lemuel. "I come to ask a favor off you, Huntington. It ain't a favor, either. You owe it to me. I give you yore start. You made ten thousand dollars off of me—sold me like you would a steer. I'll never forget that. Right now I'm jest askin' what's part mine. I want you to give Tinnemaha Pete a deed of gift to that hill at the far end of the ranch."

A hoarse exclamation burst from the other. He paled through his sunburn.

"God, man! You don't aim to take the leetle I got?" he gasped.

"If that hill was doin' you any good, I wouldn't ask it, Huntington," said the outlaw. "But it ain't. A cow'd starve to death, for all the grass that's on it. Tinnemaha wants to do some prospectin', an' he don't care to deevelop some other man's property. He'll be here ter-morror or nex' day. See that you give him a deed, or—— Well, I'm comin' back!"

"But can't you see that I got two full quarter sections, an' cuttin' off that strip'll ruin 'em?" cried Lemuel, in desperation. "An' there's my poor leetle gal tryin' to git a edjucation."

"Miss Dot'll git along, I reckon," asserted Billy Gee. "I hear she's livin' with Mrs. Liggs, an' I don't know of a better wommin in the world, than her. Mind what I'm tellin' you, Huntington! You give old Tinnemaha a quit-claim title on that ground, an' don't lose no time doin' it. See? I'm goin' to keep cases on you——"

He broke off short; flapped his hat once at the lamp, plunging the kitchen in darkness. His trained ear had caught a sound outside the house. The next instant, he was standing alongside of Lemuel.

"Don't move! Don't answer, no matter what!" he whispered into the rancher's ear.

Approaching from the direction of Geerusalem, now came the gentle purring of an automobile. Lemuel in the grip of mixed

emotions, waited motionless. He waited for Billy Gee to speak again. He wasn't sure where the outlaw was. He strained his eyes through the darkness—listening. The automobile came to a stop before the gate. That could not be Sangerly, he thought. Who then?

"You'd better git outside, if you're goin' to do any shootin'," he said in a low voice, addressing the darkness. He got no reply.

Heavy footfalls sounded outside the kitchen. They went blundering away on the run for the front of the house. A revolver roared out a volley: a strident voice boomed through the night, commanding a halt. Lemuel groped his way to the corner, caught up his rifle, and made for the front door. It stood wide open. Billy Gee had fled. He heard the man of the heavy footfalls charging down the garden walk.

"Hands up, in the name of the law! Come on, or I'll blow you to kingdom come!" came his hoarse cry. A pause, then—"Now, march over to the house! Thought you'd visit around, free an' easy, eh? Well, yore visitin' days 's about over, sport. Hey, Lem! Make a light. This is Warburton."

The sheriff, following the clew given him by Tinnemaha Pete, had ridden direct to the ranch from Blue Mud Spring. Creeping onto the kitchen porch, he had heard Billy Gee and Lemuel talking. He had seen the light suddenly extinguished. He had heard a machine come to a stop outside the gate. Racing around the house, he had come upon a man dodging into the gloom of the garden shrubbery, and apprehended him.

At the sheriff's words, Lemuel hurried back into the kitchen and lit the lamp. Presently, captor and captive entered the house. Warburton herded his man into the light. One look at the fellow, and he burst into a torrent of curses. His prisoner was Jule Quintell, pale, unnerved, but furious at the rough reception he had received.

CHAPTER XVII.

Meanwhile, Billy Gee had reached his horse and struck out in the direction of Geerusalem. It was still early evening. From the distant camp came the thunder of a stamp mill grinding loose the yellow treasure from the clinging pulp. As he rode, Billy Gee laughed. Again he had outwitted Sheriff Warburton. There was a reckless pride in the thought. He felt the spur of hazard—to do something rash for the pleasure of doing it; to make people marvel at his valor. It was a consuming fascination.

He looked up at the stars. It was a "large" night out, he told himself. He would ride into Geerusalem and glance it over, before returning to Blue Mud Spring.

Anyway, he had contrived to have Tinnemaha Pete get possession of the bonanza hill. Poor old faithful Tinnemaha—his one friend—had worked hard for what he had found. And they were partners. Partners of the richest ledge in the section! In the last two days they had uncovered a pay chute that the desertarian vowed was rich beyond the conception of prospectordom. They would sell, fifty-fifty the money, and leave Soapweed Plains forever.

There were lots of other fairer climes to which he could go. Warburton would never let him alone. He was going straight now—had been going straight ever since that wonderful night in the Huntington hayloft, when she had called him a "poor wounded, wild animal." He had promised her, and made good; thanks to that grand old wheel horse Tinnemaha Pete, and that grandest little mother who stuck to him, though he had blighted her life with heartache.

Galloping along the dark, lonesome road he went, thus musing. Then he recalled that his mother had written him that Dot was writing a novel about Billy Gee. He thrilled at the thought. Yes, sir, Dot must surely get an education—for, was not an education necessary to write books? He wondered who the girl in that novel was. Did Billy Gee come wounded, and was he cared for by the girl friend of his mother? And there was the arrival of Sheriff Warburton, and—did the wonderful girl hide the wounded bandit in her room?

From thinking over these incidents, he became possessed with the desire to see Dot. He wanted to tell her other interesting sidelights of Billy Gee's career. For instance, how he had risked three trips to San Francisco to inquire after her; how he had called on his mother, one night, while Dot was asleep; how he had met his boyhood chum, Lex Sangerly, on the branch-road line of survey a few days ago and talked with him a half an hour without being recognized. Well, it wouldn't be long now——

A distant rumble interrupted his trend of

thought. He glanced back over his shoulder and saw the twin lights of the automobile returning from the ranch. He wasn't certain whose car it was. Sangerly's, probably, with Warburton in pursuit. The truth is, it was Jule Quintell headed for camp after an unsuccessful attempt to purchase the Huntington ranch.

Billy Gee had reached that point of the Geerusalem road where it left the sandy floor of the plains and began a winding, uneven way up the mile or so of gulch to the settlement. Already the first lights of the town had come in sight. The outlaw spurred out of the road for a thick patch of chemiso brush, a hundred yards off. He gained it, swung from his horse, and waited, screened by the heavy foliage. The machine came dashing up. As it got abreast of his hiding place, it slowed down, stopped, and the headlights were switched off.

Mystified, the outlaw crouched low to the ground, watching the dark sky line, and gripped his revolver. Presently he heard the crunch of gravel underfoot. He saw the dark figure of a man pass stealthily over the wash and vanish into the gloom.

"That you, Mr. Quintell?" came the low voice of another man, some distance away.

A curse broke from the promoter.

"You boob! Are you trying to advertise this thing? Come over here!" A pause, broken only by the sound of footsteps, followed. Quintell continued: "Is it all right? Did you do exactly what I said—the width of two claims?"

"Yes, sir. But I'm not—I did the best I could about marking the spots. It's too dark to see, and a pile of stones might excite suspicion."

"Did you use up all the dust? How many spots are there?"

"Twenty-two. Yes, I used it all. That ought to be enough for an assay test, I'd imagine. I distributed it so as to lead one to conclude that the entire gulch prospects."

"Let's see one of the spots," broke in Quintell. "We can't take chances of the thing falling through."

Billy Gee heard them moving about over the gravel. He crept after them. Soon he had made his way to within a few yards of them. They were fumbling among the bowlders. The promoter growled impatiently and struck a match. He shielded it with his hands so that the light flashed downward, showing a diminutive monument of two rocks, one laid upon the other. The match went out.

"That'll do fine," muttered Quintell. "Now, as I said, Harrison, you're to take the samples. I might not be able to talk to you, to-morrow. Follow the right of way, as near as possible. That'll be the first test. The other can be taken from any part of the gulch. I'm not sure of this fellow. I found out this afternoon that he's been making inquiries about Jerome Liggs. It looks as if he's after the Huntington ranch, as a side issue. Just because he's a railroad man, don't mean that he'd pass up a rich ledge by any means."

"Did you see Huntington?"

"Yes—damn him! There's no touching him. I offered him three thousand two hundred dollars for the brush ranch. He laughed at me. I saw the time he'd have sold his soul for three thousand two hundred dollars. He's got a few beans, to-day, though. But, if Sheriff Warburton hadn't been in the next room, I'd have made him hump. Let's get to town. I'm starting matters to-night. By the way, who do you think is back in the country? Billy Gee. He was just making a get-away, and—— There's a car coming. It's likely Sangerly. He's stopping at Huntington's. Run!"

Speeding down the road from camp came a machine, its headlights visible now and again over the windrows of bowlders and clumps of brush. Quintell and his secretary dashed for their car. In a twinkling, they had climbed in and were careening off for the settlement. Billy Gee stood and watched the two cars whirl by each other. As the second one flashed past him, he strained his eyes after it. A girl's laughter smote his ears suddenly. It shocked him. He thought he could make out the dim forms of three people in the car—a roadster.

For many minutes he gazed after it, until it became swallowed up in the darkness toward the Huntington ranch. He roused himself. Then his mind went back to what he had just overheard. This man, Jule Quintell, was out to sell "salted" ground to the Mohave & Southwestern Railroad Company. To rob the company; not openly as he had done, but stealthily, perfidiously, under the guise of fair dealing. And Quintell was reaching out, also, for the Billy Geerusalem claim, was he? That voice! That face he had glimpsed by the light of the match!

CHAPTER XVIII.

This particular August night was destined to be the most eventful one in Lemuel Huntington's life. Hardly had he recovered from the shock of Billy Gee's visit, ere he received a second—Dot's unannounced arrival. She came bounding into the house, followed by Mrs. Liggs and Lex Sangerly, all smiles. She caught her astonished father in a laughing embrace, stifled his ejaculations with kisses, and told him breathlessly the reasons for her return home.

The summer courses were over at the university, with the fall semester starting. Mrs. Liggs had suggested that they make the trip, since she had some business to look after for Tinnemaha Pete. They would remain a week, then Lemuel was to accompany them back to San Francisco. What time had they arrived? On the last stage. And they had fortunately met Lex and had dinner with him in the hotel. And, oh! Her father must hear what she had written on her novel.

She talked on merrily, plying him with questions, recounting her adventures. Lemuel listened, open-mouthed, his eyes brilliant with admiration. She looked queenly and refined, he thought. And she was prettier and far more vivacious than he had ever seen her before. Once he leaned over and whispered into Sheriff Warburton's ear:

"Bob, you notice them big words she's usin'? That's what edgejication does. Listen to that! Hear 'em?"

It was a glorious home-coming. Until long after midnight, Dot regaled them with incidents, and painted glowing pictures of San Francisco for them. Around one o'clock, Sheriff Warburton recalled suddenly that the unexpected arrival of the two women spoiled his chances of a bed for the night. So he struck out for his own blankets at Blue Mud Spring, getting a little comfort out of the thought that he would grill Tinnemaha Pete the first thing in the morning. Also, Mrs. Liggs was handily near now. She had found out about the desertarian's gold strike and was here to handle her son's interest. But was Billy Gee really her son? Well, he'd find out all about it from Tinnemaha Pete. Billy Gee was as good as bagged.

When Sheriff Warburton reached Blue Mud Spring, the little camp fire was ashes, stone cold. Tinnemaha Pete and his pair of burros were gone. Warburton looked back undecidedly through the cool desert night toward the Huntington ranch. Cursing, he unsaddled his mule, spread out his blankets, and turned in.

Lex Sangerly could not sleep. He lay in Lemuel's bed and tossed, in the grip of disturbing thoughts. From the parlor lounge across the hall came sonorous evidence of the rancher's slumberous condition, rumbling rhythmically through the house. The night was tomblike. Lex rehearsed again and again the talk he had had that day with Jule Quintell. On its heels came the damaging information he had gathered against the promoter from confidential sources in Geerusalem. These had described Quintell as a tricky, unscrupulous wildcatter, associated with a coterie of other like gentry; polished crooks all, whose sole aim was to fleece the unwary, and who were generally supposed to have a strong affiliation with the "stingaree" element of the camp.

This meant to Lex nothing less than that Quintell and his placer-claim partners were banded together to make the M. & S. company pay heavily for the privilege of laying its tracks across their ground. In other words, the promoter's talk about fabulous pay dirt was only a fabrication; or the ground had been "salted" to show gold—he had heard of many incidents where worthless mines had been sold through just such means. Why not in this instance? If there had been another likely approach to the camp, he would have urged abandonment of the gulch route. But there was not.

The Quintell forces held the gates of Geerusalem, as it were. How, indeed, could he ever ascertain whether they had "salted" the ground? In his pocket was a telegram he had received that afternoon from his father urging negotiations with Quintell, and details as to terms to be wired at the earliest possible moment. And the promoter had stated that valuation would be determined according to the content of gold per cubic yard of dirt occupied by the roadbed. The richer the assays, then, the greater the price to be demanded. Lex writhed at the thought. It was a deliberate holdup, and he was powerless to prevent it. The mining laws of California favored the owner who could show mineral in paying quantities.

His reflections were interrupted by heavy knocking on the front door. Of a sudden, a tumult of men's voices broke the stillness.

Vigorous pounding came from the rear of the house. Lex sprang out of bed and peered through the window. There was a crowd on the porch, packing the garden walk. He could hear the tramp of heavy boots in the roadway leading to the barn, the crash of the barn door as it swung violently back on its hinges. The knocking came again, heavier.

"Huntington, open up or we'll bust her in!" roared a man with an oath.

Lex groped for his matches, lighted the candle.

"Hold on there a minute!" he yelled back. He began hurrying into his clothes. A strange nervousness seized him. Vigilantes —a mob—had crept up and surrounded the house. They were here to exact some tribute, satisfaction, of some sort. He heard Dot's voice in the hall, vibrant and unafraid.

"What do you want?"

"Bust her in!" cried a dozen voices.

"We want the man who's bin befriendin' Billy Gee," bellowed the first speaker. "Are you openin' this door or no?"

Lex entered the hall. Lemuel stood half dressed, pale with fright, holding a candle. Dot, clad in a dressing gown, her thick, wavy hair tumbled over her shoulders, was by his side, a glistening six-shooter in her hand. Mrs. Liggs crouched near by, wringing her hands distractedly.

"The man who enters that door, dies!" called out the girl in harsh tones.

A wild jeer went up. The crowd howled for action, and heavy shoulders started heaving against the panels. Dot fired. The bullet tore through the lintel, whined spitefully over the attackers' heads. There was a scramble away from the door.

"Smoke 'em out! Smoke 'em out!" rose the cry.

"Good Lord! They're goin' to burn down the house," wailed Lemuel wildly.

"Say, men!" shouted Lex. "There's some mistake. This is Sangerly of the Mohave & Southwestern speaking. I'll vouch for Mr. Huntington. He's never had any dealings with this outlaw."

"Is that so, Sangerly?" came the snarl from the front porch. "Well, Jule Quintell got here, to-night, when Billy Gee was leavin'. I guess that's enough. He's bin hangin' out here all along. Say, Huntington, are you comin' out, or do we burn you out?"

The roar of voices which had died down during the brief parley, rose again, violent, menacing.

"Jule Quintell lied. He lied," moaned Lemuel. Mrs. Liggs was staring at him, in a dumb, bewildered way.

Dot watched the door; her eyes glittering dangerously, her whole manner betokening determination. Lex dashed into his room to get his six-shooter. He found men trying his windows. A revolver ripped down through the panes, showering him with glass. Then, without warning, the kitchen door fell in with a crash. He got back into the hall in time to find a bristling array of guns, in the hands of bandanna-masked men, trained on the Huntington household.

In a trice, Dot was disarmed and Lemuel hurled into his room to dress. The place became overrun with the mob; rummaging, ransacking bureaus, closets, trunks. The cupboard was swept clean by the hungry members of the element. Those night-roving terrorists went about their work with vicious forethought, it seemed to Lex. It was as if they were following out some plan to render the house untenantable.

A big, burly fellow, his cruel eyes fiery over his red mask, stopped before Dot.

"You clear out of the country, if you know what's good for you, youngster!" he growled. "An' take this old dame with you," indicating the half-fainting Mrs. Liggs whom Dot held in her arms. "Git out, savvy!" He turned to Lex. "As for you—better take a room at the ho-tel, if you ain't lookin' for a coat o' tar. Outside, gang, an' clean up the ranch right."

The majority went trooping away, and presently Lex could hear sounds that proclaimed the complete destruction of the outbuildings, coupled with the frantic clamor of the occupants of coop and sty.

They led Lemuel from his room. He was in a state of collapse. Dot clung to him hysterically, begging, pleading, with that ruthless band, to no purpose. Lex began an impassioned plea, also, and was struck down by a brutal fist for his interference.

Out through the front door they hustled Lemuel. They bundled him on a horse, and with a parting six-shooter volley at the house spurred away, as the first faint shafts of light were beginning to silver the eastern sky. Soapweed Plains had never seemed so tragically silent, so filled with woe and frightful foreboding.

For one brief moment that bereft house-

hold stood stricken dumb by the sudden horror of it all—the wrecked interior of the house, the bold abduction of Lemuel. Then Dot darted wildly into her room. She reappeared, dressed, and sped out the kitchen door. Alarmed at her action, Lex ran after her—caught up with her as she was scrambling through the wire fence into the field.

"Miss Huntington, where are you going?" he panted.

"I'm following them. Help me catch a horse," she cried. "Oh, the brutes! The brutes! They'll——" She listened frantically into the night. "Hear them? They're riding toward camp. Hurry! They'll escape!"

"My car," he burst out. "If they haven't destroyed it——" He took her arm, and together they raced for the roadster standing to one side of the driveway. By a streak of good fortune—which that arch-plotter Jule Quintell could have readily explained—the night riders had left it severely alone.

They sprang into the seat. Mrs. Liggs, standing trembling on the back porch, watched them go tearing out the gate. Along the dim, gray road they streaked, the air gusting chill in their faces. The machine plunged and swayed at breakneck speed, the sand rattling like machine-gun fire against the under side of the fenders. Dot, wide-eyed, her face ghastly with fear, gazed ahead in awful fascination.

"We'll drive to town and get out the constable," said Lex presently.

A sob broke from the girl. "Oh, what terrible thing are they going to do!" she cried in anguish. "We'll have to save him. Merciful Father——" She broke off, glaring through the early dawn. "There they are! There they are!"

Lex had not turned on his headlights, not caring to make known to the enemy the fact that they were pursued any sooner than was necessary. Now, as he got sight of the bulk of moving figures in the road, he did so. The two powerful beams, falling suddenly on the troop, startled the horses. Those in the rear bolted in fright, swerved sharply, unmanageable for the instant. But that instant of shock proved sufficient to throw the body into confusion. It split to either side of the road, and Lex, a cold hand clutching his heart, steered the car into the breach.

A deafening roar broke from the night riders. They closed in after the roadster. Dot got a fleeting glimpse of her father, bare-headed, his face ashen with fear. He was straddle of a horse, his hands tied behind him. Then a dozen riders spurred up abreast of the roadster, and Lex was ordered to halt.

"Out o' that buzz waggin, pard!" commanded the big, burly mob leader. "Looks to me like you're itchin' for that coat o' tar I promised you. Jest you make another move to stop this law-an'-order bunch an' you'll git laid out cold. Gal, you hustle out o' there, too!"

The troop had halted, and were now drawn up encircling the roadster—a grim company, surely, what with their grotesque bandanna masks and attitude of lawless abandon. Lex and Dot stood on the ground near the car, listening to the menacing suggestions as to what should be done with these meddlers of the night's business.

Suddenly a shot rang out from beyond the circle. A man cried out. A wild scamper of hoofs followed, broken by the crack of a quirt on a horse's withers; then, a volley screamed over the automobile. The riders grouped about scattered like chaff, spurring this way and that as another fusillade came, dropping a man and a horse.

"If you're lookin' for Billy Gee, come take him! Come on, you brave wallopers!" shouted a lone horseman some distance away.

A wild thrill swept Dot. She gazed in blank amazement at the erect figure barely distinguishable in the early dawn. Far behind him, racing across the plains like mad, went another rider. Her father—and Billy Gee was covering his retreat! Holding in nervous indecision twoscore men who hesitated at the very mention of that notorious desperado's name! Billy Gee, then, had been a member of this mob and, finding the opportunity, had liberated her father. While she stared at him these things flashed through her mind. And she noticed now that, beside being outside of revolver range, he gripped a rifle. In that he had an advantage, which he proceeded to put into execution.

He brought up the weapon suddenly; there was a flash and one of the riders yelled, swung his horse about and raced away. Again and again, the rifle spoke. The cavalcade's morale ebbed. The outlaw reloaded, and with something of that dare-devil spirit which had made him the terror of the region, charged straight for the nearest group of the scattered cavalcade, firing his deadly rifle. The group made to stand its ground;

but the fact that this advancing foe was the dreaded outlaw of the Mohave Desert, whose past wild exploits had set them agog with awe and wonder, proved too much for their temerity. They whirled about in a panic, banging away with their six-shooters as they retreated. And, with the bolting of the group, first one and then another of the remaining members of the band, swung their horses toward Geerusalem and sped away, the rifle bullets whining in their ears.

Billy Gee stopped firing finally, and watched the rout he had caused. And, the very thing that he could have predicted came to pass. The horsemen drew rein a quarter of a mile off. He could hear the leader roaring commands, urging his fellows with curse and taunt back to the attack and the extermination of the lawbreaker, Billy Gee. They collected out on the plains to determine on a plan of decisive action.

CHAPTER XIX.

Billy Gee galloped up to the roadster. Dot and Lex had been standing, silent, amazed spectators of the ridiculous debacle of the vigilantes by this notorious knight of the road. He jerked his horse to a stop, and glanced first at Lex, then at the girl. He grinned at her, an odd expectant light in his eyes, and swept off his hat cavalierly.

"Yore father is headin' for Blue Mud Spring, Miss Huntington. Warburton is campin' there, as you mebby know. I reckon he'll be safe." He spoke in low, gentle tones.

She put out her hand. "I don't know how to thank you for this, Billy Gee," she replied, a quiver in her voice.

"You don't never need to, Dot. I owe you a bigger favor, you reckillect. I jest happened to git in with the gang, an'—I'd a-not got away with it, if you hadn't come along in yore auto, Mr. Sangerly," he said to Lex. "This here's Jule Quintell's work. He's goin' to pay for it!"

Dot was gazing fixedly up at him, a wistful look in her eyes that her heavy lashes concealed. He threw a glance toward the distant horsemen. They had begun to ride forward again, cautiously; scattering to the flanks as they came, in a wide enveloping movement calculated to get the bandit in a crossfire that would make his escape impossible.

He laughed easily and met the girl's eyes.

"You an' Mr. Sangerly better wait till they start chasin' me, then go on into camp an' arrange to leave the ranch. It's dangerous to stay there. Quintell aims to drive you out of the country. But he won't. An' say, Sangerly! I wish you'd visit him tonight. How about eight o'clock? I want you to hear somepin for yoreself. You'll say that Billy Gee ain't such a bad egg after all. Good-by, Dot! I want to have a long talk with you, some time. Did you see where Jerome Liggs struck it rich?" He started away as he spoke, with a sharp look at Lex Sangerly.

Wild yells broke from the advancing vigilantes. Their revolvers began to roar, and with quirt and spur they quickened their speed after the quarry. Dot and Lex crouched down behind the roadster to escape the hail of bullets. The pursuers began to stream past the machine, leaving a cloud of dust hanging motionless on the still morning air. It was now quite light, the eastern horizon glowing red and orange with the first shafts of the invisible sun.

Billy Gee headed straight for the Huntington ranch. His fleet, wiry little horse, trained to just such get-aways as this, swept over the plains like the wind. Dot, her small hands clenched, her face flushed with what Lex believed was anxiety, kept her eyes riveted on that lone rider, who sat his saddle with the grace of a fleeing centaur. And she noticed that he was outdistancing his pursuers. Once he looked back and waved his hat. After that, he kept gaining and gaining rapidly.

"What a wonderful little horse!" said Lex, breaking a long silence. "Look! He's gone past the ranch. They've given up. See? They've stopped!"

Billy Gee, a half mile in the lead, was still riding on beyond the confines of the Huntington place. The mob had come to a halt, abandoning further chase. Daylight had brought them face to face with the gravity of their night's activities. Masked men were likely to fall into the toils of the law, even in so lawless a locality as this. They started riding for Geerusalem tired, hungry, in no genial mood. Their raid had been for naught. Their plans to intimidate Lemuel Huntington into leaving the country, had been frustrated by the unexpected interference of Billy Gee. They had to face Jule Quintell and his clique and acknowledge miscarriage of those plans.

From discussing the matter among themselves, they grew more and more bitter against Huntington, and every one who had to do with Huntington. Lex Sangerly, Dot, and Mrs. Liggs came under a new scheme of persecution which they presently determined on. They would raid the ranch again that night, declared the blustering big leader, and they would take precautions that no Billy Gee would be about to defeat their aims.

For some reason that Lex Sangerly could not understand, it was with manifest reluctance that Dot finally agreed to accompany him into camp. She favored returning to the ranch, in the face of the fact that they would have to pass the disgruntled night riders approaching along the road.

"Mrs. Liggs will be safe until we return," he argued as they went whirling away. "This fellow, Billy Gee, doesn't seem like a man who would harm a defenseless old lady. Wasn't that the most spectacular rescue?"

"He's wonderful," said Dot. "One man against forty cowardly curs. Didn't I tell you in San Francisco what an extraordinary person he was?"

"He certainly isn't what I've always pictured a bandit to be. He's got character in his face. A rather likable fellow, I'd say."

She looked at him. "You're going to meet him to-night, Mr. Sangerly. I think you're going to admire Billy Gee hereafter. Hasn't it struck you as odd that he is trusting you? What assurance has he that you won't have him placed under arrest?"

"My understanding was that I was to visit Quintell. I didn't suppose that I was to meet him there," said Lex slowly. "Keeping an appointment with a criminal is not exactly——"

"Mr. Sangerly, please don't ask me how I know, but this meeting is going to be to your interest. I feel it. Can't you see that he is really risking his liberty so that you may hear something for yourself? That's what he said. He knows who you are—all about you. And you must remember that there have been no more holdups on the Mohave & Southwestern. He's reformed. Don't laugh—he has. I want to ask this favor of you: meet him to-night like you would keep any appointment. But not with an officer at your elbow. Will you?"

She had been speaking rapidly, a strange, eager, pleading note in her voice. Her eyes held an animated light, her cheeks the faintest tint of red. They were just entering the gulch, the rays of the rising sun silvering the windows of the camp a mile away.

For a long moment Lex stared at her. Then he broke into a laugh.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you were—well, an ardent admirer of this far-famed train robber. But your arguments are good. I promise to meet him under those conditions—this one time. You appear to know considerable about him, Miss Huntington?" he added curiously.

"I don't mind confessing to you that I do," she acknowledged in a naïve way that quite amazed him. "I know that your road will never be troubled by him again."

"Are you serious about that?" he said, watching her closely.

"I was never more serious in my life, Mr. Sangerly." She met his look, and he gazed ahead, frowning at the road. There was a short silence.

"It isn't possible that you—influenced him?" he began hesitatingly.

She shook her head. "I wouldn't just call it that. I told you how he hid that money in my bureau drawer, unknown to me? Well, during the talk I had with him, I asked him if he would do something to repay me for taking care of him. He must quit leading the life of a bandit. He promised me—like you've just promised me. He's made good."

As Lex brought the car to a stop before the Miners' Hotel, he said:

"By the way—Billy Gee mentioned a Jerome Liggs as though you knew him. Does he happen to be a relative of Mrs. Liggs, do you know?"

"He is, and I know him." She was regarding Lex intently.

"That was her son's name. I knew him when——"

"It is he," she interrupted.

He sat bolt upright, forgetting to clamber out of the car; oblivious of the fact that a crowd was gathering on the sidewalk and that Dot was the object of many eyes.

"Why, she told me he was dead!" he burst out. "We used to be kid chums. I saw in the paper yesterday where he struck it——"

The rumble of voices around him caused him to glance up. He saw the crowd of staring men. There was something inimical in their manner, a bold severity in their

scrutiny of Dot. His sudden display of astonishment and pleasure died. He sprang out of the machine and threw open the door for the girl.

The hostility in the faces that lined the sidewalk had not been lost on Dot. It struck her that this was not the elemental type of bully who had terrorized, wrecked, her home some hours before. These silent accusing men were substantial business men —the backbone of Geerusalem. She grew quite pale.

Followed by Lex she entered the hotel, the throng parting to let them pass. She breathed easier as the proprietor came hurrying forward. He beckoned them into a little writing room that adjoined the office.

"Is Mr. Huntington in camp?" he asked, in low, excited tones.

Dot shook her head.

"Get word to him not to show up here—to keep away," he went on rapidly. "The report has got around that he's been hiding the outlaw, Billy Gee. He's accused of being an accomplice—of being the relative or friend that the bandit was generally supposed to have on the plains. The camp is furious—ready to riot. They held a mass meeting last night and decided to——"

"That's an outrage," cried Lex. "I just came from the ranch. I've been staying there. The report is a lie, Mr. Merriman. Who circulated it?"

"I don't know, but Jule Quintell acted as chairman of the meeting and did most of the talking. And the camp's backing him to a man."

"That miserable cur sent a gang of his hoodlums out to our home and they wrecked it, Mr. Merriman," broke in Dot, her eyes fiery with suppressed rage. She turned to Sangerly. "Would you send a machine out after Mrs. Liggs, please? And try to reach Sheriff Warburton at Blue Mud Spring. I'm going to have Quintell arrested."

CHAPTER XX.

When Lex was gone, the girl explained to the hotel man the work of the raiders, excepting the incident of her father's abduction and subsequent rescue.

"Have you proof that Quintell was at the bottom of it?" he asked.

"No, but——"

"In that case, I wouldn't make a move, Miss Huntington. It will just provoke matters. Right now he's a power in Geerusalem. He was elected president of the stock exchange last week, and his clique is in absolute control of the camp. You couldn't get a person to believe your charges. I'd advise you to wait—talk to Warburton first."

"But, Mr. Merriman, this whole thing is a plot to ruin us. I don't know why. Do we have to stand aside and let them? They seem to want to force us to leave. To sacrifice everything we've got. Quintell was out there trying to buy the ranch last night. He offered father ten dollars an acre—three thousand two hundred dollars. Think of it!"

The man's eyes opened wide with surprise. He whistled softly and said, with a shrewd nod of his head:

"So that's it! I see the light, Miss Huntington. Something about your ranch has made it valuable to Jule. I'd guess it's mineral. I'd say it was pretty good, whatever it is, because he never bothers with anything there's no money in. But show him where he can profit, and he'll go the limit. And he can be mighty dirty in his methods."

"You think then that he——"

"I am sure that he'll make it so miserable for you, that you'll be driven to leave the plains. Knowing the man and judging from what you have said, I'd be willing to bet that this accusation against your father is his work. Except Mr. Huntington can disprove it, he stands convicted in the eyes of the camp."

The hotel man had spoken earnestly throughout, and the grave way in which he said this last stifled the words of defiance that rose in Dot's throat. Lex returned at this juncture, with the announcement that he had dispatched a machine to bring Mrs. Liggs to camp, and instructed the driver to tell Warburton that Dot wished to see him immediately, in the event the sheriff was at the ranch—which was quite likely, since Lemuel must have urged on him the necessity for his presence there.

While Dot and Lex were at breakfast, six horsemen rode singly out of camp. They were armed. They were old in the game of hip shooting. They could keep a can dancing in mid-air as long as loaded six-shooters held out. In the pocket of each was a neat little roll of bills, slipped there by Jule Quintell's secretary, Harrison. Their instructions were to seize the hill on the Huntington property, destroy the location monu-

ments and notices on what was known as the Billy Geerusalem claims—locaters, Tinnemaha Pete Boyd and Jerome Liggs—and relocate over their own signatures. Reposing in Quintell's safe were deeds signed in advance by the six, which transferred what they intended to get possession of to the promoter and his associates. The deep motive beneath this move, however, was the death of Jerome Liggs and Tinnemaha Pete.

For, after hearing the report of the vigilantes' work of the night before and storming against the luck that brought Billy Gee to Huntington's rescue, Quintell had arrived at the conclusion that the havoc wrought at the ranch coupled with the terror that Lemuel and his daughter must have been inspired with, sufficed to force them in a position to meet his terms for the purchase of the Huntington quarter sections. But of his contemplated cold-blooded murder of the discovers of the rich Billy Geerusalem strike, Quintell said nothing to his associates. Their putting away had nothing directly to do with this obvious act of dispossession. As has been said, Huntington owned the ground on which the strike had been made; the promoter knew it, and realized full well that legal right to the ground must come through Lemuel, who it must be remembered knew nothing of the newly discovered bonanza.

Meanwhile, Quintell was stirring up public sentiment in Geerusalem against him. He had called a meeting the night before and charged that Billy Gee, the outlaw, had been in hiding on the Huntington ranch. While he had not seen the bandit, he gave a graphic account of an exciting chase after that elusive person, which had terminated when Sheriff Warburton had mistaken him for Billy Gee in the darkness, and dragged him into the house, resulting in the outlaw's escape.

His whole story was a clever network of lies, calculated to brand Dot's father an undesirable citizen who was scarcely as honest as Billy Gee, since he was made to appear as an accomplice who had been masquerading for years in the rôle of a reputable law-abiding rancher. And Geerusalem believed.

At the appointed hour—ten o'clock—Lex Sangerly left Dot in the hotel parlor and stepped over to Quintell's office to accompany the promoter on an inspection tour of the Lucky Boy placer claims. He went with reluctance, feeling more keenly than on the night before his suspicions of Quintell, to which was added a profound indignation and rage against this wildcatter who was, from all Lex could hear, the cause of the Huntington outrage.

Mrs. Liggs and Sheriff Warburton had arrived in camp, and, as the result of a short talk he had with Dot, the latter prevailed on her not to make a precipitate move against Quintell until he had investigated the affair. He left the two women, and, walking out of the hotel, stood on the sidewalk, listening to the discussion going on among the groups of angry Geerusalemites. He was promptly recognized. Many knew him for an old friend of Lemuel Huntington, and caustic remarks intended for his ears began to be openly voiced.

So it was, that as Quintell, accompanied by Lex Sangerly and a number of other men, drove down the street in a machine bound for the Lucky Boy placer claims, they found a great crowd gathered before the Miners' Hotel listening to Sheriff Warburton's defense of Lemuel Huntington. The official was speaking vehemently, angrily—looking massive and potential from his elevated position on a hotel chair.

Quintell ordered the car stopped. The sheriff was just bringing his talk to a conclusion.

"An' that's how I happen to be in these parts. I've swore to get Billy Gee, dead or alive. I was at the ranch las' night, from start to finish—as I jest said. An' the man that says Lem Huntington is in cahoots with this bandit, Billy Gee, is a damn sneakin' liar."

Quintell sprang up from his seat in the machine. He was pale with fury.

"Men of Geerusalem!" he cried. "I want you all to bear witness that this sheriff of San Buenaventura County, is not only an intimate friend of Lemuel Huntington, but the very man who has let Billy Gee slip through his fingers, twice. There's efficiency for you. There's the stripe of official who has the audacity to stand up before an intellectual audience of this kind and try to whitewash the slipperiest crook who ever betrayed the trust of the good people of this camp. It's this official's word against mine. I charge Lemuel Huntington with being on intimate terms with an outlaw. Whom are you going to believe?"

The crowd broke into a wild roar. It surged around the machine, clamoring its approbation of the promoter, howling its

wrath against Lemuel, urging summary action in the matter. The din and excitement grew. His listeners deserted Sheriff Warburton to a man. He stood on the chair, purple-faced, furious, outraged.

Off to one side of him, clustered together on the hotel porch, stood a dozen young fellows. From the first they had been silent, curious spectators—cow-punchers, who having nothing in common with the men of the mines, maintained a strictly neutral attitude in an affair of which they knew absolutely nothing. They had arrived in camp an hour before from the Lone Star Ranch, situated at the northern end of Soapweed Plains, for a three-day lark, and were watching developments with no small interest. Sheriff Warburton's angry eyes lighted on them. He called them over, rapped out something to them, then he got the crowd's attention.

"I'm warnin' every man here agin' startin' anything," he shouted. "As sheriff of this county, I'll enforce the law if I got to shoot to do it. Keep away from Huntington an' his ranch, if you ain't lookin' for trouble." He turned to the Lone Star riders. "Men, git yore horses an' stand ready for orders! As for you, pardner," he sang out to Quintell, "if you don't want to be throwed in for inspirin' violence, you'd better git a-goin'." With that he got off the chair and elbowed his way through the pack of grumbling men toward the machine. "Drive on, or I'll show you what kind of a sheriff you got to deal with!" He let his fiery gaze rest on Quintell's face.

As the car started to move on its way, the promoter looked back at him.

"You can't bluff us, Warburton. You may protect a crook, if you want to. But, by God, you won't get away with it, I'm here to tell you!"

The Lone Star riders spurred up at that moment, and at the sheriff's orders cleared the street of the crowd.

CHAPTER XXI.

The day passed slowly. It was a day throbbing with threat and tragedy on the eve of happening. Night fell, but there was no noticeable change in the situation. Public sentiment against Lemuel Huntington was crystallizing rather than abating. Sheriff Warburton's action of swearing in an additional twenty men, to aid the work of his Lone Star posse, and his dispatching of a number of these to guard the Huntington ranch, had gained him the enmity of the camp. That the official was protecting a criminal without taking steps to capture that criminal, became common talk on the street. But the Geerusalemites had hesitated to rebel against law and order as represented by Warburton and his deputies.

During the early afternoon a number of incidents had occurred which did anything but relieve the tension. The first of these was the arrival of a desperately wounded horseman. He came riding up the main street, half hanging out of his saddle, semi-conscious. He was one of the six gunmen dispatched by Quintell to the Billy Geerusalem claims a few hours before. He died, and the name of his slayer died with him.

Lex Sangerly had returned from an inspection of the Lucky Boy placer group at the mouth of Geerusalem Gulch, with the conviction firm in his mind that the Quintell outfit had "salted" the ground over which the proposed branch line of the Mohave & Southwestern must of necessity pass. He had watched Harrison taking samples of the gravel, here and there, and seen those samples delivered to the assayer. It had all seemed part of a clean transaction, except when he had suggested the advisability of himself choosing a second test of the ground for purposes of comparison. To this Quintell and his associates demurred; going so far as to declare that they were not in any wise eager to sell the railroad a right of way, and pointing to the sensational story of the Lucky Boy placer strike appearing in the *Searchlight*.

While Lex was waiting at the hotel for the assayer's report on the samples, his father arrived from Los Angeles, unexpectedly. Mr. Sangerly, a clean, sharp-eyed man of fifty, with a close-cropped mustache and thick, stiff, iron-gray hair, was accompanied by the State traffic manager, a Mr. Hudson, a quiet, mild type of person whose one prepossessing trait was his ability to listen and say nothing. The western manager had decided on the receipt of his son's telegram the day before, to take a personal hand in the negotiations for the purchase of a right of way over the Lucky Boy group.

Following a happy renewal of old acquaintanceship with Mrs. Liggs and a talk with Dot, Sangerly, senior, Hudson, and Lex held a conference with the owners of the placer claims in Jule Quintell's offices. The

certificates of assay showed the ground to be rich—thanks to Harrison's precision in the old-time art of mine "salting." As Lex had reasoned, the price demanded by the Lucky Boy coterie for the privilege of laying the M. & S. tracks across their fabulous claims was correspondingly large. It was excessive, staggering—fifty thousand dollars.

The conference came to an end without an agreement being reached. The railroad men would take the matter under advisement. The coterie smiled complacently.

Briefly, when night settled on that waspish little desert gold camp, Jule Quintell and his circle of wildcatters were in command of the situation. They had the population aroused against Lemuel Huntington—the man, himself, was in hiding for his life. They had the Mohave & Southwestern in a position where it must either pay their price into Geerusalem or build a terminal out on a rocky wash far beyond the confines of the settlement. However, with the success of his double plots all but realized, Jule Quintell worried. Why had he not heard from the expedition he had dispatched to finish Tinnemaha Pete and Jerome Liggs? Had the other five suffered the fate of the rider who had died without speaking?

Shortly before eight o'clock, a little old man came stumping out of the darkness of a side street. He paused in the glare of a brilliantly lighted dance hall. From every side rose the din of orchestras, the howls of tipsy revelers, the rumble of men's voices, and the tramp of the crowds on the plank sidewalks. Riding up and down the street, stern of face, watching the restive population, went members of Warburton's posse.

The little old man was Tinnemaha Pete, who, though he knew little or nothing about Geerusalem, knew the vast Mohave Desert as a child knows its rudimentary A, B, C's. Just now, he kept gazing timidly at one after the other of the passers-by. Finally, he stepped up to a man and asked him where Jule Quintell lived.

Following directions, he stumbled away through the dark and found the neat rock bungalow built on the side of a small hill that partially overlooked the camp. Lights shone through the spacious windows, and the sound of an operatic selection being reeled off on a phonograph came to his ears. He fixed the house firmly in his capricious old brain and stumped back the way he had come. And never having seen the man Jule Quintell, he wondered what this popular promoter looked like.

At about the same time Dot was reminding Lex Sangerly, in the office of the Miners' Hotel, that he had an appointment with Billy Gee at the home of Jule Quintell. But Lex was wrought up over the uncompromising attitude of the promoter in the matter of the Lucky Boy transaction, and held out against giving him the satisfaction of a visit, even.

"But I wanted to accompany you, Mr. Sangerly. And, we'll ask your father to go along, too," she urged.

He looked at her in surprise. Then he laughed gently.

"I'm going to charge him with having directed that mob last night," she went on. "I can't endure this awful suspense any longer. My poor father hiding at Blue Mud Spring, like a criminal—both of us driven from our home—dreading to go back to that home!" Her eyes held a tragic hunted light, her voice carried a strange note of appeal. "I feel, Mr. Sangerly, that something will come of this visit. I don't know why, but I have a premonition that you are going to be indebted to—to Billy Gee."

Lex gazed soberly at her for some seconds; then he said:

"Very well, we'll go. And I promised you I'd not have an officer at my elbow, didn't I?"

Accompanied by his father, Lex and Dot set out for the Quintell bungalow, the hotel porter leading the way. The spacious windows were still lighted; the phonograph still reeled off its operatic serenade. Harrison, Quintell's secretary, opened the door, and ushered them into a wide parlor, furnished in an elaborate style so wholly unlooked for in this out-of-the-world wilderness as to amaze the visitors.

Quintell shortly entered from the adjoining room. He was dressed in a becoming negligee of silk lounging robe, and smoked a long calabash pipe. He greeted them in his most elegant fashion, and his eyes fastened on Dot. As the preliminary talk continued he kept gazing at her frequently, with a look that conveyed considerable of approval and admiration.

"I regret very much to hear that you suffered at the hands of that mob, last night, Miss Huntington," he said presently. "Personally, I am opposed to violence of that sort. It would seem to me that in this case

where your father has been found to be on intimate terms with Billy Gee, the bandit, that instead of venting its spite by destruction, the populace should rather insist——"

Dot flushed with anger, over the palpable deceit in the man's demeanor.

"Pardon me, Mr. Quintell," she broke in, "but I understand from a reliable source that you were instrumental in this violence that yon now pretend to deprecate. I came here to-night to find out if you are man enough to show your hand." Her eyes were on him, fixedly, ablaze.

He removed the calabash from his mouth.

"My dear young lady," he replied; "it strikes me that you could have visited me at my office, instead of disturbing the quietness of my home in this manner. However, allow me to say that I am man enough to tell you that, having nothing to gain and not harboring any ill feeling against your father, I certainly would not urge the action taken by that crowd of infuriated men. Perhaps you'll tell me who the reliable source was?"

The girl was silent, studying him closely.

"Billy Gee told us," asserted Lex, speaking for the first time. His father turned wide, horrified eyes on him.

"Billy Gee!" cried Quintell. He threw back his head and laughed. "In Heaven's name! Is it possible that officials of the Mohave & Southwestern are also involved in the heroic exploits of this romantic daredevil? Tell me," he continued tauntingly, "have these reported train holdups I've read so much about been a little stunt to advertise your road, similar to 'Death Valley' Scofield's transcontinental run a few years ago?"

Lex winced at the insult. He said quite coolly:

"You may draw whatever conclusion you choose, Quintell. Miss Huntington is here this evening to speak with you about——"

"I have already answered Miss Huntington's question," broke in the other, and there was a trace of a sneer in his voice. "I don't feel myself called upon to refute the statement of a common criminal. Another thing—the citizens' committee, of which I am chairman, decided at a meeting this afternoon to give Mr. Huntington twenty-four hours—or until six o'clock to-morrow evening—to dispose of his property and leave the plains. What action will be taken, should he fail to comply with the order——"

A cry of horror escaped Dot. She rose to her feet, pale and trembling. She gazed wildly, dumbly, from Lex to his father, then fearfully at the promoter.

"Good Lord, Quintell!" gasped young Sangerly. "You certainly aren't going to be a party to this outrage? It's criminal, I tell you! This man, Huntington, is as innocent of the charges as you are. I'll stake my life on his honesty."

Quintell shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I'm not the whole show here. The ruling was made in open meeting. So far as the disposal of the property is concerned, I'll buy it off of him. But I won't pay a fancy price—it's not worth it." He resumed his calabash and added: "As a matter of fact, I wouldn't touch it, if you turned down the right-of-way purchase. I couldn't."

Dot, struck speechless by his appalling announcement, now found her voice. Defiance flashed from her eyes; her face set with furious purpose.

"Mr. Quintell, you and your committee may continue to issue orders," she cried. "You may decide anything you please. I defy you to put it into execution. I'll take it personally on myself to see that my father leaves the plains in the morning. But I remain. Do you understand? I remain! I want to see how many of you will take sides against a woman. And when it suits me to sell the Huntington ranch——"

"I'll buy it," burst out the elder Sangerly. He snapped it out. And a sudden silence fell. Lex held a hand over his mouth to hide a grin. Quintell straightened noticeably. His teeth clenched over the calabash. The western manager of the Mohave & Southwestern was watching him, the sagacious, estimating look of the cool-headed business man in his sharp eyes.

For a long moment, both men eyed each other steadily. Then a hard smile parted the promoter's lips.

"Assuming that you'll buy it, Mr. Sangerly, what are you going to do with it? Particularly when you realize that your purchase of the Huntington ranch means our absolute refusal to grant your company right-of-way privileges across the Lucky Boy ground into Geerusalem." He paused, his smile vanishing, his eyes narrowing as he disclosed his hand. "Another thing, consider our negotiations held up pending the complete settlement of the Huntington scandal and the final disposition of this ranch."

Harrison, sitting in an obscure corner of the room, caught his breath; amazed at his master's rashness. Sangerly represented a powerful corporation.

The railroad manager chuckled deep down in his throat.

"Since you have taken such an open stand in the matter, why not go on and tell us your underlying motive, Mr. Quintell? Why not enlighten us with the fact, for instance, that, having learned of a rich gold strike on the land owned by Miss Huntington's father, you are reaching out after it—trying to get possession by methods very little better than those employed by your friend, the jumper?"

Quintell sprang from his chair. His jaw set with sudden fury. Lex and Dot stared at the speaker in blank astonishment. He also rose, pointed a commanding finger at the promoter, and shot out in sharp tones:

"I'm buying that ranch, Quintell. You may consider the right-of-way negotiations ended. We'll make the camp of Geerusalem come to us. If we can't do any better, we'll build our terminal on the Huntington ranch. And you people can freight the four miles. If——"

"Oh, we can, can we!" cut in the promoter nastily. "Let me tell you something, Sangerly! You just start that Hawthorne, Nevada, game of giving this town the go-by, and I'll see that your gangs'll never drive another spike."

"I'll take that challenge. And, now, let me tell *you* something. The Billy Geerusalem claims are so rich that the new camp of Liggs, that I propose to start on the Huntington ranch, will be the metropolis of Soapweed Plains in one month. Do you happen to know Mrs. Agatha Liggs?" Quintell did not reply. There was an odd, crafty glint in his eyes that somehow did not blend with his uncertainty of manner. "Well, I've had a talk with her. I know why you want that ranch. That's why you'll never get it, Quintell."

Here, the promoter found an opening. He had regained much of his poise.

"I always get what I go after, Sangerly. Buy, and I start legal action. I have deeds showing transfer of those mining claims by the locaters—the origial discoveries. I'll tie your operations up as tight as a drum."

The other pinned his steely eyes on him. "Was one of those original locators, Jerome Liggs?" he asked.

"Jerome Liggs is a criminal at large—wanted for the robbery of the Bakersfield city treasury. I don't deal with criminals except to notify the sheriff and——"

He broke off. Something in the semi-darkness of the hall, visible through the open door, had attracted his eye. He stared at it, fixedly—the gleaming barrel of a six-shooter. His eyes widened. The six-shooter advanced, and Billy Gee appeared in the doorway. His glance swept the room. It rested a moment, hard, on Dot, and returned to Jule Quintell. The promoter paled, crumpled, under it. Dot's breath came fast, and a blush rose vivid into her cheeks as Billy came in.

CHAPTER XXII.

"You don't look awful glad to see an ol' side kick, Miles," said Billy Gee suavely. "An' you're the big minin' cheese, Jule Quintell, I've heerd so much about, eh? Oh, Pete!" he called out. "Come in an' see who I've discovered!"

Out of the dark hall trotted Tinnemaha Pete. He shuffled up to the bandit's side, screwed up his rheumy faded eyes on the promoter, and gabbled excitedly.

"I bin watchin' around for you ever sence that time, Miles," went on Billy Gee. "By rights, I oughter empty my gun into you. Folks say I'm a purty tough cuss. I'm Billy Gee, Miles. Tell these two gents the name you know me by. Hear me!"

"His—Jerome Liggs," faltered Quintell, with an effort.

"Jerome!" gasped Lex. His father straightened in bewilderment. The bandit who had, for three years, rifled the trains of the M. & S.!

"Now, Miles, tell 'em what you done to the Lucky Boy claims, last night!" rapped out the outlaw, taking a step nearer to the man. "Tell 'em how you salted 'em!" He jammed the menacing six-shooter into the other's midriff.

While the promoter began in a reluctant, hesitating voice, Harrison edged unnoticed out of the room. He sped quietly out the back door of the bungalow, and ran like mad through the darkness, bound for the main street to arouse the camp.

Meanwhile, Miles, alias Jule Quintell, confessed. His audacity, self-assurance, arrogance, vanished with that confession. Confronting him was a man who held a long-standing grudge against him—his Nemesis; none other than the notorious desperado

Billy Gee! The man on whom he had shunted the crime of robbing the Bakersfield city treasury. The man whom he had dreaded to meet—whom he was certain would never have the temerity of searching him out, however.

Billy Gee turned to Dot and the two Sangerlys.

"Folks," he said evenly. "Miles, here, jest told you that Jerome Liggs robbed the Bakersfield city treasury. That's why I'm Billy Gee. But I'm turnin' him over to Warburton to-night, an' Tinnemaha Pete—who used to be janitor of the Bakersfield city hall—I'll swear he saw Treasurer Miles doin' some mighty funny things in his office, 'round one o'clock one night."

Shortly after the door of the Quintell bungalow opened, and its owner came out. Behind him came Billy Gee, followed by the rest. They set out down the street—a strange procession surely, five men and a girl. Dot gained Billy Gee's side and touched his arm.

"Jerome," she whispered. "I'm afraid—you must not meet Sheriff Warburton. He's looking for you."

"Don't you worry," he replied. "If I have to skip out, suddin, tell Lex I want to see him at the ranch, the furst thing in the morning. An' you come along. That other chap sneaked out after help. We'll fool him."

She kept pace with him—Quintell moodily plodding on before them. Once she looked up at Billy Gee. There were fine lines in his face, she thought, despite the fact that she could only just make out its distinguishing lineaments. She found herself thrilling over the realization that she was walking alongside a real so-called "bad man" in action; one who, through her influence, had abandoned his lawless career to get back within the pale of the law-abiding. Yet Sheriff Warburton was after him. She sighed tremulously.

They reached the main street and found it strangely deserted. Billy Gee closed up the gap between himself and his prisoner, and held the deadly six-shooter against the small of Quintell's back.

"If yore friends start shootin', pard, so do I," he said grimly. "Better you take to the sidewalk, Dot," he added. "There's goin' to be trouble. Tell Lex to hurry ahead an' notify Warburton that——"

A wild shout broke from the blackness of a vacant lot opposite. It was answered by another and another. The street suddenly became alive with men, pouring from every conceivable hiding place in the vicinity. Lex and his father cried out a warning. The younger man caught Dot by the arm.

"Come! Run! They'll trample us——" She shook him off. Her eyes were flashing with a resolute fire.

"I'm all right. Take care of your father." Her voice rang out harshly.

The outlaw chuckled. Lex hesitated, started off on a run for the sidewalk with the elder Sangerly, collided with the onrushing horde of men and went wallowing. Tinnemaha Pete escaped the crush, and fled down the street. Billy Gee's disengaged hand had fastened on Quintell's coat collar. He jerked the promoter back until the six-shooter was cutting into the fellow's flesh.

"Talk to 'em, Miles!" he hissed, into the other's ear. "Talk to 'em—fast, or I let go!"

Quintell put up a trembling arm.

"Men! He's got me. Stop—men! He's got me—can't you see? Stand back! For God's sake, stand back, men!" he panted aloud, panic in his eyes.

They halted—frenzied, baffled, circled about the trio, a solid phalanx of lawless humanity that itched for the letting of blood.

"Fellers," said Billy Gee, his tones cool and deliberate, "this here is a personal matter betwix' me an' him. His name's Gene Miles. He robbed the Bakersfield city treasury and laid the job to me!"

"He lies, men!" cried Harrison, shouldering his way forward. "This is Billy Gee, the bandit. The dirty sneak who struck down Sheriff Warburton that time and escaped, the criminal whom Lemuel Huntington has been protecting. He held us up. He's taking Mr. Quintell down to the office to make him open the safe. Are you going to let him get away with it?"

"Talk to 'em, Miles!" threatened Billy Gee. "Tell 'em to fall back an' let us through. You'll go before I do, Miles—so help me!"

And again the promoter called on that riotous crowd, supplicated it in an agony of anxiety. Grudgingly, its ranks parted, closed in behind where Dot brought up the rear with Billy Gee's other revolver tight gripped in her hand. For, carried away by the desperation of the outlaw's position, by the sudden realization that she trembled for

the safety of this man who had so gallantly rescued her father the night before—and by the fundamental fact that she cared—Dot had in that supreme moment whisked the six-shooter from the holster of her romantic hero, resolved to back him in his fight.

They went on down the street, the crowd swarming after them, enveloping them. Presently Sheriff Warburton appeared in company with Tinnemaha Pete. The little old man hobbled off for the security of the sidewalk. The official came on. A half a block behind him loomed a number of the posse, spurring forward. Billy Gee halted his prisoner. Warburton strode up, gun in hand.

"Hullo, Billy!" he said curtly.

"Howdy, Bob!" said Billy Gee. "Here's yore man. What'd I tell you?"

Warburton looked at Quintell, and nodded. The Lone Star men rode up just then and began herding the crowd off the street.

"Collusion!" shouted Harrison, at the top of his lungs. "Sheriff, I demand the arrest of Billy Gee, outlaw and criminal at large. Men, they're in cahoots! It's a frame-up!"

A storm of curses and threats broke from the mob. It swept around the mounted deputies suddenly and, led by the big burly fellow who had directed the plundering of the Huntington home the night before, rushed toward Warburton. The nearest rider caracoled his horse about to break the advance. In a twinkling, he was whisked out of his saddle—his horse sent plunging away. A shot rang out. Warburton's voice blared above the tumult, and other posse men drove full tilt into the van of frenzied men. Guns began to roar. The big leader pitched dead in his tracks.

The sheriff, taking advantage of the opportunity, herded Quintell on a run down the street toward the hotel. On his heels followed Billy Gee with Dot. They reached the building and hurried inside, and Quintell was taken upstairs, manacled and left in the sheriff's room under guard. From outside still came the sounds of conflict, fainter now as other deputies, drawn to the scene by the uproar, strengthened the ranks of their fellows and began putting the mob to flight.

As Warburton started out of the hotel he halted in front of Billy Gee standing gun in hand, talking to Dot.

"You know what we agreed, Billy?" he said tersely.

The outlaw nodded. "I'm goin' out to the ranch to-night, Bob. The agreement stands."

"I'll be out there before noon, Billy," said Warburton, turning away.

"You'll find me waitin', sheriff."

Half an hour afterward, a hostler brought two saddle horses up to the hotel. Lex Sangerly and his father stood on the porch and watched as the notorious bandit, Billy Gee, and Dot, the romantic daughter of Lemuel Huntington, mounted and rode down the quiet street, bound for the lonely ranch on Soapweed Plains. The moon was just rising. There was beauty in the night; a subtle charm in that desolate realm. But Dot's heart was brimful of grief, heavy with sadness—Billy Gee was surrendering to the law in the morning.

CHAPTER XXIII.

They cantered along, side by side, out of the settlement and down through the silence of Geerusalem Gulch. For some minutes neither spoke. Over the far-off eastern range the moon was rising, the gray floor of Soapweed Plains visible ahead like a vista of ghostly sea. From somewhere rose the pitiful cry bark of a wild dog foraging hopelessly for food. As they reached the point in the gulch where it began to spill its rocky bottom over the bosom of the plains, the girl drew in her horse to a walk. Billy Gee followed suit.

"Why did you ever do it, Jerome?" she asked in dead tones.

He bent a sharp look on her. Her cheeks shone wet in the moonlight.

"I'm glad, now, I did. But I couldn't help it. He had me. It was my only way out—I wanted to save you folks, an' there was Lex bein' swindled on a placer proposition. I wouldn't stand for——"

"How did you know?"

"I seen him—it was right out yonder," pointing toward the wash where the night before, he had by accident overheard Quintell and Harrison discussing the salting of the Lucky Boy claims. He explained the incident briefly to her. "He lit a match an' I got a sight of his face an' knew him. You don't know how I felt about it, Dot," he went on, in hard tones. "Here was the man who had made me what I am. The man I'd bin huntin' for three years. When he planted that evidence against me to save himself, I was one of his clerks—an' I'd bin

already talked about to run against him at the nex' election. That's how he—— Well, that's all past."

"But Pete knew about it. Why didn't you let him——"

"Poor ol' Pete! He's scary, an' more'n likely they'd think he was jest imaginin' things. No, Dot! It's better the way it turned out." He paused; then continued, after a moment: "When I got away from the night riders this mornin', I rode back to the ranch to keep my mother comp'ny. I wasn't watchin' for Warburton. I was—I might as well tell you. I was thinkin' of you, Dot. Warburton an' yore dad come in from Blue Mud Spring. He got me dead to rights. There was my mother, an' I couldn't fight. Anyway, we talked for some time. I told him about Miles, or Quintell, as he calls himself. I put it up to him—to let me go git him. Yore dad took sides with me, Dot. Yes, he did. I told 'em how Miles was out to drive you folks out o' the country, that he'd salted this placer on the railroad comp'ny—and Warburton put me on my honor." He laughed. "Everything turned out dandy. An' the Billy Geerusalem claims are goin' to be split three ways, between Pete, my mother, an' yore dad. That's bin agreed on, an'—everybody's happy."

He reached out suddenly, and his hand closed gently over hers. Her face was turned away, toward the boundless reaches of desolation beyond which lay the now invisible violet and yellow scallop of range that had formed the background of all her past romantic dreams. She turned about suddenly, stifling a sob, clutching his hand.

"It's not too late, Jerome," she cried. "You can escape—you have to. He must not take you. Do you know what it will mean? The penitentiary—for life! Dear God! You owe it to yourself—to your mother—to me! Jerome!" She jerked her horse to a stop. Her face was torn with emotion; her large eyes, swimming, wild with appeal.

He reined in his animal close, leaned over and caught her in his arms and drew her to him. His breath was coming in great gasps.

"Dot—darlin'!" he choked hoarsely.

Her heart opened, and, sobbing, she poured out all its love of him, all her hopes, her fears, her despair, in one desperate moment of entreaty.

"Don't you remember, Jerome, dear?" she wept distractedly. "'You poor, wounded wild animal,' I called you. I wanted you, then. You came out of my dream land, a part of my dreams. You belonged to me. You belong to me now. To-night, I'll speak with my father. You must be on your way to the Mexican border within an hour. We'll sell the ranch and the claims and follow, with your mother."

It was nearly midnight when Lemuel Huntington admitted them. Dot was pale and drawn of face, strangely preoccupied. Billy Gee sat down, bowed his head, and stared at the floor. She brought up a chair and took her place beside him. Lemuel clad in an old-fashioned night robe, stood and blinked at them curiously. Throughout that day he had been repairing, where he could, the damages wrought by the night riders. The house looked much the same as it always had. Presently, he nodded gravely to himself—he recalled the agreement the outlaw had entered into with Bob Warburton; he verified a long-standing suspicion that his daughter was in love with Billy Gee. Without a word he tiptoed back to his room to bed.

"It's too bad," he murmured to the darkness. "But she'll ferget it, soon's she gits back to her edjucation. It's too bad. He saved my life——" He sighed heavily for a long time.

The next day dawned. The sun rose, gloriously bright, and a blessed little breeze frolicked merrily out of the northwest. A lone mocking bird had lingered for one whole hour in the elderberry tree in the garden, pouring out a beautiful pæan—heralding to the world its love of life and freedom .

Billy Gee was still at the ranch. He sat on the front porch with Dot. They sat facing the distant island of chromatic hills where nestled the camp of Geerusalem, watching the white thread of road. Now and again, the girl would moan pitifully, wringing her hands in silent agony. At other times, Billy kissed her, and comforted her.

From the direction of the barn came the sounds of Lemuel's hammer, restoring the ravages of the mob. He was unusually grave, and thoughtful. The hours dragged by; heavy, tragic hours. Eight, nine, ten, eleven came and went. At half past eleven, an automobile suddenly made its appearance out of the far-away island of hills. It approached at a rapid rate. The driver proved to be Lex Sangerly—alone. He brought the

car to a stop and sprang out, and shook hands with Dot and Billy Gee, who had walked out into the driveway to meet him.

"Compliments from Sheriff Warburton," he said seriously. "He's attending to a little official business and couldn't come out at the appointed hour. He asked me to deliver this message," bringing a yellow sheet of paper—a telegram—out of his pocket. Lemuel strolled up as he read:

L. S. SANGERLY, SR., Manager, M. & S. R. R.
Your wire relative Billy Gee parole considered and approved. Withdrawal of charges against him by your company and your personal concern in his case make me feel keenly interested in his redemption. They are directly in line with the honor system which I am inaugurating in the penal institutions of the State. Kindest regards to you and your family. I am instructing the sheriff of your county of my action. HIRAM BRONSON, Governor,
State of California.

Later that afternoon, Billy Gee strode up to Lemuel where he sat placidly smoking on the back porch.

"Huntington!" he said shortly. "You reckillect that mornin' I told you I was goin' to pay you back for sellin' me out to Sheriff Warburton?"

The other took his pipe from his mouth and stared soberly at the speaker. He did not speak.

"Well, you're payin', old sport. Me an' Dot's goin' to be married nex' Sunday, whether you like it or not."

Before Lemuel could reply, there was a heavy footfall on the porch and a strident voice boomed:

"Hold on there, a minute, Mister Liggs!" They turned to see Sheriff Warburton stepping out of the kitchen. Dot, Lex, and Mrs. Liggs stood looking through the door, smiling expectantly. The sheriff took out his handcuffs as he approached.

"I always told myself that I'd hang these things on you, some time, young feller. I'm goin' to—perticular on account of what you jest said. Come here, Dot!" He led the girl alongside of Billy Gee, and deftly handcuffed them together. "After Sunday, that's the fix you'll be in—an' that's where I git satisfaction."

In the months that followed the Huntington ranch vanished, save two fenced-in small acres that held the house, outbuildings, and the cool garden with the trim little grave in one corner. The town site of Liggs sprang up, mushroomlike, and took its proud place on the map of San Buenaventura County. The Billy Geerusalem claims blossomed out, bonanzas; and the camp of Geerusalem lost its ranking as the metropolis of Soapweed Plains. It never knew a railroad—even as the elder Sangerly had avowed to Jule Quintell now languishing in the State penitentiary.

Prosperity can never change the sterling ones of humankind, no more than may the powers of alchemy convert slag into gold. They are still the same—Tinnemaha Pete, quaint, timid old desertarian; Sheriff Bob Warburton, big of soul and purposeful; achieving, ambitious Lex Sangerly. While the dark days of uncertainty just passed, remain still green in the mind of a man whose mania was to give his daughter an education; remain green, too, in the mind of his daughter, whose romantic brain worked out the destiny of her own happiness; nor can the shy little mother, who lived and suffered for her wayward son, ever forget—nor that son, who found the turning point in the realization that the price for a hunted animal could not tempt her of the compassionate heart.

All this and more has been narrated by Dot in her novel which she finished during the first year of her marriage. She called the book "Billy Gee-rusalem," and the Mohave & Southwestern took it in hand and popularized it.

ANOTHER CHINESE TRICK

THE last time Mr. Wu, the great Chinaman, was in the United States, he attended a dinner at which he told a story about one of his countrymen having committed suicide by eating gold leaf.

"But," said the lady on his right, "I don't see how that killed him."

"Perhaps," answered Wu suavely, "he was overcome by the consciousness of inward guilt."

The Index of Error

By John Fleming Wilson

Author of "Make or Break," "His Splendid Enemy," Etc.

We all know that sailors can tell strange tales of the sea, but surely never was told a stranger one than this tale of a world that slipped out of its bearings—and back again

SAMUEL GARFINKLE and I were sitting at cards in the captain's room of the steam schooner *Mary Walsh*. It was blowing a fresh gale from the northwest, the spray was lashing over the starboard rail at every outward roll, and occasional seas rose and roared across the deck load aft with ominous thunderings that died away in sullen mutters as the singing chains eased up and the heavy timbers settled again to their bed. Now and then Garfinkle would pause, card in hand, and listen.

"Henry is young, but a first-class skipper," I remarked, supposing my companion was worried. The *Mary Walsh* was old and her commander a youth whom I had known and liked for a couple of years. It was his third voyage as captain and, not half an hour before, he had apologized, left us to amuse ourselves, and gone to the bridge.

"Strong inshore set with this slant o' wind," Garfinkle rumbled, and proceeded with his play.

I nodded. "We should pick up Yaquina Head in another hour."

At this moment the door opened, let in a blast of wind and closed again, giving us a glimpse of our host's face. He had intended to come in and been recalled by some hail to us unheard. I observed that Garfinkle's mind was on anything but the game. This was odd, for his business was on the sea and, so far as I knew, he had never before shown the slightest concern about what really was not his affair. He and I were distinctly passengers, and the handling of the steam schooner was entirely out of our province.

In a moment Henry Evans came in. His ruddy face and clear eyes were fixed in a queer expression. But he said nothing, sat down and asked for cards. We played fifteen minutes, and I won handily; both of my companions were thinking of something else.

"What are you two dreaming of?" I demanded.

Henry glanced bashfully at Garfinkle's old, worn, austere face and seemed to shut his lips on speech. The elder man broke the silence.

"Perkins," he said, and sighed.

We both looked at him questioningly. Captain Evans said civilly, "Perkins, sir? Who was he?"

"He was master of the steamer *Mayford Bells,*" Samuel Garfinkle replied gravely.

"I never heard of either Captain Perkins or the *Mayford Bells,*" Evans said.

"Likely not," Garfinkle assented. "Perkins lost her fifty-one days out from Baltimore, thirty-one years ago. Eight lives lost. That ended Perkins."

Henry Evans smiled faintly and uncomfortably. I saw his big, capable hands grip the table edge as the deck sank beneath us, tilted and hung a long second. But his voice was cheery. "Too bad! Where did it happen?"

"Four miles west-nor'west of Siletz bar."

"Seven and one-half miles inside the course I'm steering," Evans remarked.

Garfinkle cast an eye at the telltale compass above us. He seemed to be calculating. He hesitated. Then he said gently, "He was making the same course you are to-night, captain."

Evans flushed. "You heard what the mate reported when we were abreast of Tillamook? And the course I gave him? I've done this four times, sir. I'll pass Yaquina Head eight and one-quarter miles off."

"Sixteen years, four months and eight days after Perkins lost the *Mayford Bells,* Peter Reynolds found himself driving into the breakers north of the Siletz," Garfinkle went on. "And at the investigation he was forced

to testify that after passing Tillamook he had set the usual course *and* the course you are steering to-night."

Evans looked at me with a curious expression. But he said nothing. The cards lay unheeded on the table till a heavy lurch sent them slithering to the deck rug.

"Captain Reynolds was *forced* to say he was steering the usual course, sir?" Evans asked when the silence had grown embarrassing. "Why, everybody does it! What course *would* you steer?"

Garfinkle is known on every ocean as an expert on matters marine. The young skipper's tone was respectful and my friend gave him a civil nod in acknowledgment.

"Yes, Reynolds was forced to swear he had set the customary course for Yaquina Head. Perkins compelled him to. Perkins had waited sixteen years, three months and a day from the hour he lost his ticket till he faced Reynolds and made him confess that he, too, had steered south-by-east, half-south magnetic."

Evans straightened in his seat. "That's the course, sir," he said in a muffled voice. "Did you—do you——"

Garfinkle met Evans' eyes gravely. "Twenty minutes ago you started in the door to resume the game," he remarked. "Something called you back and you returned to the bridge."

"I felt as if the third mate wasn't just keeping the course," was the murmured response.

"And you went up and saw that he was—that your vessel was steering steadily on the proper course," Garfinkle continued.

Evans went into details of the pains he had taken with his compasses. "And so I'm sure I'm steering south-by-east, half south, sir," he ended.

"So am I," Garfinkle replied. "Just as I know that old Perkins on the bridge of the *Mayford Bells* was steering south-by-east, half south; and just as I am positive that Reynolds, on the big *Saturnus*, was keeping his course as laid down by authority. Yet the fact remains—I was a witness for Perkins—that he put the *Mayford Bells* ashore right in here, lost eight lives and his ticket. And more than sixteen years afterward Reynolds sat sweating in the witness chair before the inspectors and swore he, too, was steaming south-by-east, half south magnetic. Yet his swift liner had nosed into the shoals and he owed the saving of his ship and of five hundred lives to a man whom he had once sent to Poverty Pier—Captain Perkins that was, 'Ole Bill' Perkins that got to be, who knew the index of error."

Evans' voice rose a tone: "Index of error, sir? What error?"

Garfinkle's notes boomed in the cabin: "God's," he said.

The *Mary Walsh* sheered wildly, lurched wickedly and recovered with a queer, strained yielding of hidden timbers, as a man rises from a fall searching his muscles for the weak one that gave way. Evans reached for the speaking tube on the wall, blew into it, and called to the bridge, "Haul out two points, Mr. Briggs!"

The telltale slowly swung to the new course, wavered and then steadied. Garfinkle made no remark. He picked up the fallen cards from the deck and shuffled them thoughtfully.

"What did you mean when you spoke of God's error?" I demanded presently.

My friend waved one hand toward our host. "*He* begins to suspect," he responded quietly. "Let us wish him the luck of never being sure."

"Amen!" said Evans heartily.

"It was Perkins who discovered it," Garfinkle went on, smiling reassuringly on the young skipper. "And because it is my business to follow up such things and because to-night the *Mary Walsh* has been hauled two points outside of the course set down in the sailing directions I'll tell you what I know about the loss of the *Mayford Bells* and the narrow pinch the *Saturnus* had. Incidentally, it illustrates the fact that figures lie—even the figures we have put down in our mathematical tables with all the assurance of omniscience.

"The *Mayford Bells* was built in Chester, Pennsylvania, for a company organized to run a line of steamships from San Francisco to the Columbia River. When she was ready to turn over to her owners they sent Captain William Perkins over to fetch her. They loaded her with cargo and sold passage to some sixty people who thought it a lark to round the Horn once in their lives.

"I was in New York when the *Mayford Bells* was ready for sea, and I accepted Perkins' invitation to accompany him to the Pacific coast. I had business in Buenos Aires, in Montevideo and in Mazatlan—all ports which Perkins was to make. I joined

the ship at Baltimore, and nothing occurred of moment till we had rounded Cape Horn and were in the Pacific. One night Perkins came into my cabin, sat down, and said bluntly, 'All my compasses are wrong.'

"As you both know, it is not wholly unknown that a new vessel sometimes needs readjustment of compasses several times before she settles down. But owing to the peculiarities of any ship's structure, her compasses will deviate separately. And by observation of, say, three of them one may well approximate the true correction to be made. I recognized Perkins' cause for dissatisfaction, but I could not understand the expression of bewilderment on his face.

" 'As I figure it, every compass on board has shifted two and one-half degrees westerly,' he told me, like a man expecting to be laughed at.

"He told me his reasons for believing this, and they were good. However, I gave him the standard reply, which is, as you know, an assertion of the infallibility of our mathematical calculations and the fallibility of all our instruments of observation. In brief, I refused to believe that the magnetic pole had shifted its place. One never does admit that the north pole may suddenly veer, of course. Yet that was what Perkins wished me to think: that his compasses still pointed to the north but that the north had shifted.

"I tried to argue him out of his notion, and he countered by telling me that many years before, when a boy in a Scottish ship, the captain had, apparently, missed his proper course by three points and so lost his vessel.

" 'It was in this region,' Perkins told me. 'And I am sure the old man was right when he told the board that his compasses had gone wrong for no reason he could fathom.'

"You understand that when Perkins managed to get the necessary observations to check his compasses by, they proved to be correct. I laughed at him for thinking they had gone wrong.

"We put into San Francisco for two days, coaled, discharged a little cargo, took on a couple of the line's officials, and sailed for the north. At nine o'clock on the second day out from the California port, Thomas Reynolds, the second officer of the *Mayford Bells,* reported Tillamook Rock dead ahead. It was a dirty night, and I instantly understood that picking up the rock had been a mere chance. But that chance had saved the ship. Perkins wasted no time in hauling out to clear the rock, but turned around like the cautious man he was to steam back and pick up Yaquina—Cape Foulweather it was then called—and the only light we could be sure of.

"Naturally such a maneuver excited comment among the seafaring men on board. To be sure, one could not tell how far off Tillamook we had been when we sighted it; but not one man in a hundred would have steamed back to Cape Foulweather. Myself, I was puzzled. But two hours later we got a perfectly good bearing of Foulweather and steamed north again. Perkins came down and sat on my settee and sweat.

" 'I was steering a course to pass outside the rock eleven miles,' he told me. 'And Reynolds picks it up dead ahead! You all think I'm a fool, Garfinkle. It looks crazy to steam back to pick up a light we've already passed in the clear, doesn't it? But I had to be sure!'

" 'Sure of what?' I asked the man.

"That simple query stumped him. He stared, fidgeted, got up and rasped, 'My God, I wish I knew!'

"When the commander of a vessel loses confidence in his ship, himself, or his reckonings, everybody on board feels it. I came on deck at one in the morning and found Reynolds mooning in the wet outside his room. The *Mayford Bells* was steaming steadily into an exceedingly black sea whose crests ran wickedly before a booming nor'-wester. We fell into chat. But before long, Reynolds dropped his voice and said solemnly, 'I hope Captain Perkins doesn't let anybody know what he's done to-night. It would mean the loss of his reputation.' Then Reynolds laughed: 'Compasses don't lie.'

"I ventured into deep water: 'Then you think he gave the wrong course after passing Foulweather?'

" 'I don't think,' he retorted. 'I know it!'

"Now you see how matters shaped themselves to make what happened appear black on the record. In the first place Perkins had —so his second officer said—given the wrong course; when a chance sight of the Rock had corrected this, Perkins lost his nerve and steamed back the course he had come, till he got a fresh departure. Just like a man hunting a light switch in the dark—he went back as nearly as possible the way he had come. *Now,* if anything

happened, all the evidence would be that Perkins didn't know where he was nor what to do.

"While Reynolds and I half-heartedly made excuses for the man the *Mayford Bells* ran down her course—and found no Tillamook Rock at all. Perkins had summoned his officers to the chart room and sent a quartermaster for me. When we had gathered wonderingly he opened his business curtly and with no trace of embarrassment.

" 'I judge us to be twenty-eight miles off Tillamook Rock,' he said. 'But the course we have made will not show that. I know perfectly well that several of you have got it strongly into your heads that I don't know what I am doing. But the courses I have set, the courses run and what we have made good are all down on the log. I am going in now to pick up the rock, and from there set the course for the Columbia River bar. I take all responsibility!'

"And three hours later, just in the darkest of the night, the *Mayford Bells* checked in her course, took a cracking sea over and dropped her tail on a shoal.

"Reynolds bumped into me in the confusion, dragged me to the lee of a deck house, and demanded as solemnly as though I alone knew, 'Where are we?'

"I didn't have any notion and said so. On the bridge we found Captain Perkins, quite calm. He gave his orders without flurry and said he was going to pull off to the southward with the aid of wind, sea, and a strong tide. This sounded reasonable. It was undeniable that the *Mayford Bells* would pound to pieces where she was and that the only salvation for us all was to get clear. But Reynolds voiced the common question: 'Where are we?' he bawled at Perkins.

"Perkins answered as quietly and confidently as ever man did, and for the moment his reply served. But Reynolds was thinking quickly, and he served an ultimatum on his commander.

" 'That is impossible, sir,' he told Perkins solemnly. 'And the shoals along here make out to the south'ard. You've got to pull her out direct. Your only chance!'

"Just how long the dispute would have gone, no one knows. I gathered that Perkins would be firm. He was skipper and the risk was his. But a terrific sea rose high above the rail of the wallowing steamship and crushed down on us. When it had swept on inshore Perkins was senseless in his battered cabin and Reynolds left alone of all the officers to save what he could.

"The rest of the story is simple. The *Mayford Bells* never drew out of that nest of shoals, and there her bones lie to-day. Reynolds was highly commended for gallantry and skill in saving all but eight, and, when the investigation took place, the inspectors regretfully canceled William Perkins' ticket. I had to testify myself, and you can understand how damning it was for me, Perkins' friend and well-wisher, to swear to his eccentric acts that night.

"Perkins swore to me on the street a week later that Reynolds had played him false. 'He knew my intention of pulling out to the south'ard and if he had done this himself the ship would have come clear and no lives would have been lost except those taken by that sea that knocked me out.'

" 'Admitted,' I told him. 'But how the dickens was Reynolds to believe you knew what you were about when you put the wreck's position where you did? By the course you steamed, you should have been just seven miles south of Tillamook—instead of twenty-seven.'

" 'I knew!' he told me, and that was the last I saw of him for ten years.

"Then I was traveling on the old *State of California*, on a dark, blustery autumn day, when one of the mates approached me and pointed out a small boat riding the heavy seas inshore.

" 'That's Ole Bill Perkins,' he said, laughing. 'Ye can always tell when the weather's poorly up north by seeing Ole Bill dancing around off the Siletz.'

" 'That's almost the spot where the *Mayford Bells* was lost,' I remarked.

" '*Mayford Bells?*' answered the boy. 'Never heard of her. Rotten coast, anyway. Wonder why Ole Bill sticks it? Eh? Crazy, they say! Waiting for somebody!'

"I stared at the little boat tossing a mile away in the spume and smother and did not mention to the friendly officer that Ole Bill was once Captain William Perkins. But when I glanced westward I caught the low line of another steamer's smoke above the distant crests. Thomas Reynolds was taking his new liner *Saturnus* down the coast. I wondered, did *he* suspect that his old commander was at sea off the Siletz in an old dory?"

Garfinkle stopped and stared at the *Mary Walsh's* telltale. Then he resumed:

"Several years later I had occasion to join the *Saturnus* for the northern voyage. Reynolds received me hospitably and gave me the freedom of his cabin. I recall nothing of the trip except that the *Saturnus* kept an inside course all the way, passed Yaquina Head and Tillamook four miles off to the dot and ramped over the Columbia River bar regardless. Reynolds had got the name of being a crack commander of a crack ship. He was envied. But he never spoke of the time he had served under Captain Perkins on the *Mayford Bells*.

"Then a gas-schooner man dropped into my San Francisco office to give me some information on the loss of a salmon cannery man, and I learned from him that Ole Bill Perkins had set up, unofficially, of course, as pilot for the Siletz.

" 'There's naught but twelve feet on the Siletz bar at high water,' said this worthy. 'But Ole Bill Perkins swears he can bring a twenty-six-footer in, without touching.'

"I inquired further about my former friend and found he was living on the beach, doing a little fishing and trapping, but spending most of his time outside the river, at sea in his old dory. He was, the gas-schooner man admitted, 'cracked.' Pressed for details, he ventured to say that Ole Bill was an atheist. 'He swears the books are all wrong, the north pole is adrift and figures lie,' my visitor remarked.

"On a very stormy week in December I found it needful to go to Portland. I found the *Saturnus* sailing immediately and took passage on her for the north. Reynolds was cordial, but by no means so unreserved as of old. He was worried. Though the weather was nothing that should have caused uneasiness to the master of so fine a vessel as his, he was on tiptoes all the first day and only relaxed at evening. When he had written up the night orders he invited me into his cabin, and we sat down and chatted a while. Gradually he veered the conversation around till it touched on the *Mayford Bells* and Perkins. Reynolds was peevish over the completeness of Perkins' disaster.

" 'They tell me,' he said, with shifting eyes, 'that he's down along the Siletz fishing and mooning around where the wreck was.'

" 'They call him Ole Bill,' I went on. 'He pretends to be a pilot.'

" 'No ticket, let alone a branch,' Reynolds murmured.

" 'They say he's lost faith in everything and is crazy,' I added.

The next evening we picked up Yaquina Head five miles in and set the course for Tillamook, via Cape Lookout. 'Confound these owners ashore who grudge a pound of coal or an hour's time,' Reynolds told me crossly. I stared at him. The man was all nerves.

" 'It makes a man gray to cut corners on this coast,' he went on. 'But they make no allowances for weather, and I've got to rush along and make schedule.'

"It was a very dirty night, and when we had left Yaquina Head twenty miles astern I accepted Reynolds' invitation to join him on the bridge. There I found him much astir. But we picked up Tillamook and later the light vessel and so into port at dawn.

" 'Make the trip with me again,' he said, as I bade him good-by.

"I found myself his guest a month later on the southward voyage, and I was shocked by the change in the man's appearance. From a spruce, capable, buoyant man ready with a word, a laugh or a joke, he had grown morose, sullen and just a little untidy. I set it down as plain nerves.

"We left the Columbia at dusk of a winter's day. The sea was smooth, oily, and with a strong undercurrent. We rounded the light vessel, and Reynolds laid a course that would bring him three miles off Tillamook.

" 'It'll blow great guns before midnight,' he told me, peering up at me from under his grizzling brows. 'Feel the northerly set of the current!'

" 'The barometer is high,' I reminded him.

" 'Hang the barometer!' he burst out. 'Barometers lie half the time! All these confounded instruments——'

"I let his unfinished sentence hang in the air. I was dreadfully embarrassed, to tell the truth. It is awful to see the commander of a big liner going to pieces bit by bit, hour by hour. And Reynolds was not himself at all.

"We duly picked up the rock and the third officer reported it two and one-half miles inshore. Reynolds listened and mumbled over the new course.

" 'What course, sir?' asked the officer sharply.

"'Sou'-by-east, half south,' Reynolds cried out, as if stung. 'The usual!'

"The third left with a glance at me at once deprecatory and scornful. Reynolds relapsed into silence, and I found myself reverting in memory to old times. The steamer was driving smoothly and powerfully ahead, sheering the long, low rollers with lordly ease. A faint breeze fluttered the lace curtains at the open window.

"'Odd winter weather,' I remarked, after a while.

Reynolds frowned. 'Hang the barometer!' he said crossly, and tapped it. It rose perceptibly. But at that very instant a sharp, sodden breath of chill air rushed in at the window and tore a paper from the desk. It was followed by another gust. Then the *Saturnus* dropped her bows heavily.

"'Just like that!' Reynolds said. 'Here it comes—a rotten blow!'

"At eleven o'clock we were steaming very slowly into as wicked a southeaster as I have seen. Reynolds had gone to the bridge, and I sat in the cabin listening to the groaning of the vessel, the thunder of the sea, and the dull rumble of the engines below me. At midnight Reynolds came in for a cup of coffee. His face was pale, his eyes glazed, his hand shaking. He drank.

"'You'll run out of this at Blanco,' I said, for lack of better.

"'Long ways to Blanco,' he returned sullenly. Then he dropped into his chair and stared at me. 'J'ever hear or see Perkins lately?'

"I was astonished and looked at him. Reynolds laughed feebly. 'The old man sticks in my mind to-night,' he said. 'Hang these owners who make a man skim the coast to save coal. And on such a night!' He stumbled to the door and was gone. At one o'clock the second officer came in, stared around, and asked for Reynolds.

"'I haven't seen him since he went to the bridge at midnight, or shortly afterward,' I told him.

"'He's not there, sir,' was the response. The young man glared around for the missing man, murmured something about not daring to quit the bridge for over a minute, and vanished. I went to find Reynolds. He was aft on the boat deck studying the compass there with the aid of a small flash light. I can still see his intent face, his twitching hands, his eyes flickering over the swinging card. I withdrew unseen and unheard. It was not my affair if Thomas Reynolds had got the jumps and couldn't trust his steering compass. But I went to the bridge and informed the watch officer that his commander would be along instantly.

"That capable youth gave me a stare and then said, 'Rotten night.' He left my side and went to the trap hatch and ordered the man at the wheel to keep her a little out. On his return he mildly remarked, 'Inshore set, I think.'

"And at that moment I swear I seemed to feel the big *Saturnus* pulled away from her course, dragged unwillingly and reluctantly toward the gross darkness that veiled the iron-bound coast. The sense of this was so strong that I almost cried out in warning. But at that instant Reynolds arrived. He went straightway to the binnacle, glanced at the card, and summoned the third officer. I heard the stern rebuke. 'You're keeping her out too far, mister. J'think we want to sail around the wide Pacific and waste coal just to please you? Keep her on her course, mister.'

"I almost slunk away and to my room. But not to bed. I sat there listening. And presently there was a knock at the door and Reynolds came in. His face was set in lines of grim decision. But he spoke gently, 'I have the dickens of a time keeping my youngsters from putting offshore such nights, Garfinkle. But I make 'em steer the regular course. We'll pick up Yaquina Head in an hour unless it blows up thicker than it is now.'

"The steamer dived into a tremendous comber that moment and the thunder of the water coming aboard drowned my reply. A second avalanche seemed to twist the *Saturnus* till her frames gave and plates yielded. Reynolds cocked his head to one side. Then his expression changed with lightning rapidity to one of grotesque amazement. A third great wave swept across us and the door bulged under the impact and a dark stream of water flowed like blood to my feet. It sparkled oddly, as if from some metallic content. I bent over and the truth bit into my very bones.

"'Sand!' I groaned. Reynolds stooped and read that omen with bloodless lips. Then he tore the door open and was away.

"I followed him, staggering along the alleyway, buffeted by great dollops of brine, clutched at by the fiends of the wind. I

made the lee of the pilot house and stared ahead. The sea was a wild lather, an incredible tumult of tossing crests, shouldering billows and spouting surges. But all this was as nothing to the knowledge that the *Saturnus* was far inshore of her course, in shoal water, likely any moment to take the ground and so be lost.

"I clambered to the bridge and found Reynolds savagely cursing his third mate for not keeping a proper course. But time was short. The wheel spun, the engines quickened, and the steamer slowly thrust her lofty stem seaward. For ten minutes I scanned the scene anxiously. Then the breakers died astern and the deeper water rushed about us. It was a narrow squeak. But before I could get below, before the *Saturnus* had dragged herself out of the grasp of the shallows, I heard the engine-room gongs clamor and felt the machines stop.

"This was madness indeed! But when a searchlight shot out and lit up a dory tossing a cable's length away, I knew that the end of Reynolds' history and Perkins' tragedy had not yet been reached. The old man came aboard in the bight of a heaving line and climbed to the bridge and confronted the man who, sixteen years before, had ruined him.

" 'You are this minute four and one-half miles west-nor'west of Siletz bar,' the old fellow bawled. And he began to pour out orders in a stream. Reynolds vainly tried to assert himself. The other's imperious manner and truculent attitude were too much for him. Then the watch officer took matters in his own hands. I heard his clear young voice say, 'Pilot! Repeat the course!'

"Ole Bill Perkins bellowed it to the leaden skies. Reynolds grabbed me by the arm. 'My God, he's going to lose me my ship!'

" 'I'm going to save it for you!' Perkins boomed back at him. 'You fool! To trust your compasses! Ha-ha! The same old course—south-by-east, half south! Hundreds make it daily—and it set you inshore eleven miles and into the heart of the Siletz shoals! Ha-ha! Listen to Ole Bill Perkins!'

" 'Pilot!' called the third, 'did you order full speed ahead?'

" 'Full speed ahead!' Perkins bellowed, clutched the bridge rail with his knotty fingers and peered into the smother. Fifteen minutes passed. Then the *Saturnus* slowed, stern lifting high on the racing seas, bows dipping into the breakers that swarmed up on every hand. Reynolds stood by me in silence, his pallid face set in despair, his body barely holding itself upright. I caught his whisper: 'He's going to pile us up on Siletz bar—twelve feet at high water and we draw twenty-one!"

"Something kept me silent. After all, what were a few figures set down in a book? Written on a card? Scribbled on a slate? I watched Ole Bill Perkins. Nothing of the failure in his attitude nor his voice. The conviction grew on me that he *knew* what he was about.

"It seemed hours and was likely only minutes before the liner was in the thick of the breakers on the shallow bar. As you know, Captain Evans, that channel is not marked, except in summertime. All the buoys had long ago been taken up or swept to sea. But Perkins conned the steamship steadily in, using engines and helm as though he had known the *Saturnus* and all her tricks and weaknesses and virtues intimately for years.

"We were twice swept completely. We struck heavily once, lightly time and again. But by some extraordinary play of skill, resourcefulness and knowledge our self-appointed pilot got us in—into a channel narrow but deep, flowing upward in a great tide that bore the *Saturnus* out of the tumult and fury of the bar and into a broad expanse where the gale lost its power. The anchor went down in forty feet of water and Reynolds collapsed at my feet.

"The next morning we had it out, Perkins and Reynolds and I. The old man was triumphant.

" 'You ruined me sixteen years four months and eight days ago,' he croaked in Reynolds' face. 'You swore the compasses of the *Mayford Bells* were true and I was wrong. You put me ashore with no ticket, no reputation, and my career gone.' He stared at the younger man with fiery eyes. 'What course did *you* make from Tillamook Rock for Yaquina Head, Captain Reynolds?'

"Reynolds gulped, dropped his eyes, and stammered the old course, 'south-by-east, half south magnetic.'

" 'And that's what you will testify before the inspectors?'

Reynolds revived sufficiently to mutter, 'If I ever get my vessel out of this puddle and . . . r that bar.'

"Perkins laughed loud and long. 'I'm the only pilot there is to this water,' he boomed. 'I'll take you out, Captain Reynolds. But first, I want your written statement of the course you steered.'

"'My compasses——'

"Reynolds grew stern: 'They pointed to the pole,' he said gravely. 'Just as they pointed to the north when I ran the *Mayford Bells* ashore on these same shoals.'

"'But——'

"'No buts,' Perkins said solemnly. 'The truth.' He turned to me. 'Garfinkle, this man ruined me on the strength of an illusion. And that same illusion has ruined him.'

"'Illusion? Illusion?' I repeated.

"'The great illusion,' he answered solemnly. 'Ships are sailed by it and men swear by it and die by it and ruin other men by it.'

"'What illusion?' I demanded.

"'That the needles of the compass point to the magnetic pole and that the pole changes its position only slowly and within limits men can calculate.' He paused. 'I've studied that matter sixteen years, and I found God out at last. They tell us He never errs, and that the laws of the universe never change and that we can't alter them. They do change. God was working with weak and treacherous materials when he built this world, and there's an index of error. Sixteen years ago all the compasses on this part of the coast suddenly changed two points and a quarter to the eastward. Men swore that I was wrong and my compasses right. Last night again the handiwork of God slipped. The magnetic pole shifted suddenly under some uncalculated stress—and Captain Reynolds ran his liner into the shoals.'

"'And you have been waiting—all this time?' I asked, appalled at the man's doctrine.

"He thumped his thigh. 'I knew when I lost the *Mayford Bells* that not I, but the men who figured on God's laws, were at fault. I knew that even He is unable to make imperfect things perfect and that some day his magnetic pole would shift a little—and all the figurings of men go adrift.' He rose and stood over the stricken Reynolds. 'You sat in judgment on God when you ruined me—and God let the world slip at its moorings and ruined you.'

"Call the whole affair preposterous, if you like," Garfinkle went on slowly. "Perkins took the *Saturnus* to sea next tide and went back to the Siletz on a passing tug. Reynolds resigned in San Francisco. At the investigation he had nothing to say except that he was steering the usual course. They let him off easy, putting it down to extraordinary set of tide and all that. But Reynolds believes, and will believe to his dying day, that there are moments in the life of this imperfect world when the divine calculations fail, when the divine laws hardly make good, when the compass shifts two points and a half and sailormen go ashore blindly swearing that it was not the fault of God but their own."

Captain Evans stared at us both out of his clear eyes. I caught his profound and searching look. I turned to Garfinkle.

"And you? Do you believe Perkins' theory?"

The door opened and an officer of the *Mary Walsh* appeared. "Must be strong inshore set of current, sir," he said to his commander. "I held her out a little over two points as you told me to, and"—the lad's voice cracked—"Yaquina Head is barely a mile inshore and abeam, sir!"

The three of us stared up at the telltale compass. Under our very eyes it swung gently but surely two points westerly. There it steadied. Evans drew his breath slowly. He turned to his officer.

"Haul in two points and a half, mister."

The world had slipped back into its bearings again.

DEMOCRACY SPREADS

AMERICA is not alone in its democratic ways. William B. Wilson, secretary of labor in the Wilson cabinet, began his life's work by digging in a coal mine. That sounds distinctly American. But Arthur Henderson, who rose to the eminence of a cabinet position in England while he was yet in the prime of life, began his career as a molder in a foundry.

In Bonanza

By William MacLeod Raine

Author of "Tangled Trails," "Troubled Waters," Etc.

Any novel with such a rattling good story and such living, breathing characters as this tale has would not seem to need anything more to recommend it, but this novel has, for all of that. It is history as well as fine fiction—a true and fascinating picture of Western mining life, in the early sixties, in the Nevada country of the famous Comstock Lode, which Mark Twain tells of in "Roughing It." "In Bonanza" is by long odds the biggest and most mature thing which Mr. Raine has done. We think ourselves lucky to have secured it.

(A Five-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

THE PONY EXPRESS RIDER.

FAR as the eye could see lay a rough and broken desert of sage. It stretched to the edge of a flat and arid world.

In front of the long, one-story adobe station a man waited, eyes turned to the west. His hand rested on the flat, straight back of a handsome chestnut horse. Byers was small and wiry, hard as nails. His high-heeled boots, buckskin breeches, flannel shirt, and skullcap had all been chosen for utility and not for looks. He wasted no energy in useless protest, but the fat station keeper who leaned against the door jamb and chewed tobacco knew he was seething with impatience. The wrangler holding a second saddled horse knew it, too. For the Pony Express rider from Carson was late and his delay was keeping Byers from the start on the next lap of the transcontinental journey.

The fat man sang lugubriously and tunelessly, in a voice that had been created solely for his own amusement:

"Old Grimes is dead, that good old man,
We ne'er shall see him more,
He wore a single-breasted coat
That buttoned down before."

The wrangler looked at him reproachfully and murmured, "Durned if he wouldn't sing at a wake and spoil everybody's enjoyment."

"His heart was open as the day,
His feelin's all were true.
His hair it was inclined to gray,
He wore it in a queue,"

intoned the vocalist.

"Not news," the wrangler told himself bitterly. "I done heard all them interestin' details two hundred and seventy-three times." Aloud, he attempted a diversion. "Len' me a loan of a chew of tobacco, Jim."

The station keeper dived into his left hip pocket, produced a ragged plug, and offered it to his helper. Meanwhile he gave further information about the wearing apparel and physical idiosyncracies of one Grimes, defunct.

"Wonder what's holdin' Tim," the stableman interposed at the end of another stanza.

"He ain't been late before in a blue moon. I don't recollect as he ever was late," answered the fat man, drawn momentarily from his rhymed epitaph.

Byers said nothing.

The habit of the hard-riding Pony Express messengers of Russell, Majors & Waddell was to be ahead of schedule. Each man prided himself on covering his relay under the assigned number of hours. The mounts supplied were chosen for speed, stamina, and heart; the men for gameness, resource, and knowledge of the country. To be late was contrary to the tradition of the service.

The Pony Express was a triumph of American pluck and energy. It stretched from St. Joseph to San Francisco, two thousand miles through the heart of the Indian country. The enterprise included five hundred superb horses, nearly two hundred stations, a hundred riders. The men in the little racing saddles were stripped to the last ounce. For protection they carried only a knife and a revolver. The mail bags never

weighed more than twenty pounds. Each letter was written on thin tissue paper. The postage on the smallest was five dollars. Between the Missouri and Sacramento the time-table called for ten days, but often the pouches moved two hundred miles toward their destination in twenty-four hours.

Those in the saddle had to be man-size in soul. No weaklings ever applied for this job. Some of those in the service were outlaws, for court warrants did not reach into the sage. Many were desperadoes.* But few of them were quitters. They played out the hand that had been dealt them.

"Tim's sure late," the wrangler said hurriedly, for he saw signs of a return to music which did not soothe his savage breast.

"Kid McClintock's early. Hour ahead of his schedule," the station keeper replied.

Far away to the east a small cloud of dust rose from the sage and greasewood. Almost at the same time a second billow of yellow alkali appeared in the sunset glow of the opposite horizon.

The fat man grumbled. "Hell's hinges! That accident to Meighan is liable to shoot the whole schedule up. Tim'll have to double back to Carson in his place. I'll have him dig us up another man there."

The rider from the east arrived at the station first. He pulled up beside the wrangler, leaped to the ground, and at the same time reached for the tie straps which fastened the flat leather mail pouches to the saddle. Two minutes was allowed for the change of sacks from one horse to another, but usually the transfer was made in ten seconds. The messenger, a long, lean boy, swept the pouches deftly from one saddle to the other.

"Where's Meighan?" he asked.

"Done bust his laig tryin' to gentle that sorrel mustang. Tim Keefe will have to take his run to-night."

"Where's Tim?"

"Not in yet. There's his dust." The station keeper waved a fat hand toward the sunset.

Byers had been watching intently the dust cloud moving through the brush. "Something's wrong," he said briefly.

Hugh McClintock looked. The approaching horse was off the trail. Its gait was peculiar. Plunging unsteadily in spurts, it was weaving from side to side. Instead of a rider, a sack seemed to be prone in the saddle. McClintock ran forward and caught the bridle of the unsteady horse. The flank of the animal was clotted with a splash of dust and blood. The sack slid from the saddle as the horse shied. The sack was a man who had been clinging feebly to the mane of the bay. He groaned.

"Piutes—this side the Silver Mountains," he whispered, and fainted.

The station manager, the wrangler, and McClintock gave him first aid. An arrowhead, deeply imbedded, projected from the flesh back of the shoulder. One of the rider's boots was filled with blood, due to a bullet which had shattered the ankle.

Byers spent no time in helping with the wounded man. He had other business. If the Indians got a messenger, that was in the day's work. The mails had to go through without delay. He transferred the pouches to his own saddle, swung on, and galloped into the desert.

Kid McClintock rose. He, too, must be on his way, for there was nobody else to carry the mail to Carson City.

"I'll be movin'," he said briefly.

"Looks like you're elected," agreed the fat man, following the boy to a water olla where the young fellow washed his baked throat, drank deeply, and filled his canteen. "Not much use wishin' advice on you. It's a gamble o' course. Injuns may be anywhere. But I reckon maybe you better swing to the south and hit the Walker River range. They're liable to be watchin' the trail for you."

"I reckon."

The boy moved to the fresh horse, spurs jingling. He had done his day's work. The horse upon which he had ridden in, lathered with sweat and still breathing deep from a long, fast run, was mute testimony of this. The dry, powdery dust of the desert covered every inch of the young rider. His legs were stiff and his shoulders tired. But the spring of splendid youth trod in his stride.

* This was more true of the station keepers and the attendants than of the stage drivers and Pony Express messengers. Slade, the notorious man-killer, was superintendent of a division at Julesburg, Colorado. He succeeded Jules, whom he murdered in cold blood. Slade ruled his crew of wild assistants with an iron fist. He was an able and efficient servant of the company. Later he was hanged by the vigilantes in Montana. Legends of the country, probably much exaggerated, credit him with having killed thirty men. W. M. R.

He had before him more than another hundred miles of travel, through a country infested by hostile savages. He might get through alive or he might not. That was on the knees of the gods. He had to take what came. More than once he had run a gantlet of redskins. He had been a target for their arrows and their slugs. Tim was not the first messenger he had seen bring in on his person souvenirs of their missiles. The one salient point was that the mail had to go through. It always had reached its destination—always but once. On that occasion the messenger offered the only acceptable excuse for his failure. He was absolved of blame because he lay dead on the trail, his scalp gone.

McClintock shot westward in a cloud of dust. Half a mile from the station he swung sharply to the south.

CHAPTER II.

"HURRAH FOR WASHOE!"

Placerville was busy as a hive of bees on a warm June afternoon. Its hotels and restaurants were crowded to capacity. The saloons were doing a rush business and the gambling halls teemed with a packed and jostling humanity. Grocery stores bustled with the activity of clerks filling orders, packing supplies, nailing up boxes, and sewing bales. The main streets were filled with mixed crowds of miners, speculators, gamblers, men of leisure then known as "bummers," and such flotsam as is always washed up in the stampede for a new mining camp.

Vaqueros drove loaded mules and burros through the streets with soft, liquid oaths of command. A sixteen-horse ore wagon, painted red, the bed of it six feet deep, rumbled down the road with two "back-actions" behind, each of these also filled with ore. They had come straight from the diggings at Virginia City. Freight outfits were loading at stores and wholesale liquor houses with supplies for the new camp. Men bought and sold hurriedly. A hundred outfits were being roped up to cross the Sierras to the Carson Valley. Ox teams swung into town and out again with goods for the new district. Everywhere was that orderly confusion of many cross currents of humanity moving to a common end.

That common end was Washoe. The name was on every tongue. It dominated every mind. All the able-bodied, old prospectors who had come round the Horn in the old days, who had followed the stampedes to Kern River, the Fraser, and Gold Bluff, were now headed as by one impulse for the silver diggings at the foot of Mount Davidson. Such rich grounds never had been seen before. All one had to do was to pan the outcroppings and grow rich in a few weeks. Hurrah for Washoe!

A canvas-covered emigrant wagon drawn by a pair of emaciated horses moved slowly toward the hills. The driver was a bullet-headed young fellow with sullen, close-set eyes. These were a peculiar grayish-yellow, and the pupils were very small. He was unshaven, poorly dressed, and far from clean. The hardship of a long, overland trip had undermined his self-respect and worn away the thin veneer of the man's civility. At the crest of the first rise he turned in his seat and looked back toward the town. "Good-by, Hangtown," he shouted with an oath, shaking his ragged whip.*

The skeleton horses crept up the road toward the mountains. Presently, evidence of the stampede to Washoe began to manifest itself. The prairie schooner passed a broken-down stage, a smashed wheel, a splintered wagon tongue snapped in the middle. An empty whisky barrel advertised one of the chief staples of trade. A dead burro lay half buried in the mire.

The road had been a good one once. Perhaps it would be hard and firm again after the slush from the rains had dried. Just now it was one to try the patience of man and beast. There were stretches where even the pack mules bogged down, while Mexican drivers beat and hauled at them to an accompaniment of excited curses in their native tongue.

At every gulch there was a bar, the fixtures improvised from a couple of dry-goods boxes and a canvas top. Restaurants announced themselves every few miles, as well as hotels which had all necessary accommodations for tired stampeders except food, beds, and bedding.

Later in the day the prairie schooner came into a region where patches of snow began to appear in the hill crotches above. The grade was stiffer and the poor horses made sorry progress. A dozen times they gave up, exhausted. The driver beat them furi-

*In the early days, Placerville was often called Hangtown.

ously with his whip and flung raucous curses at them. From the wagon a big-eyed child and a wan-faced woman dismounted to lighten the load. Once the woman timidly murmured a protest at her husband's brutality. Savagely he turned on her, snarling his rage explosively. She shrank back, afraid that he was going to use the whip on her. "Don't, Rob," she begged, face white as the snow in the bank beside the road.

A burro train swung round the bend, and the man flung away from her and lashed the horses instead.

They camped that night at the mouth of a cañon and were on the road at daybreak next morning. The travelers were well into the mountains now. The spring rains had been heavy and had loosened the snow on the slopes. Landslides were frequent, and the air was filled with the thunder of avalanches. The trail itself was treacherous. It was honeycombed with chuck holes where the mules of pack outfits had broken through and wallowed in the mud.

The American River plunged down a cañon beside the road. A growth of heavy pines bordered the trail. It was snowing before the gaunt team dragged into the clearing at Strawberry Flat.

Hundreds of men and scores of teams were camped there for the night. The animals were tied to the tongues and sides of the wagons and fed from long feed boxes. They were protected from the cold by heavy canvases lined with blanket stuff. The men who handled the jerkline and the blacksnake curled up under the wagons. Soon they were fast asleep, oblivious to the soft snow that drifted in and wrapped them about.

The driver of the prairie schooner fed and watered the horses while his wife made supper. She found dry wood for kindling in the wagon, and the little girl, who was all thin arms and legs and wild flying hair, gleefully cleared away snow from the spot selected. Soon a fire was roaring and little Victoria was sniffing the savory odor of a jackrabbit stew.

She hopped up and down, first on one foot, then on the other.

"Goody, goody! Le's hurry up 'n' eat, sister Mollie," she shouted, waving a spoon excitedly.

After supper Robert Dodson disappeared into the nearest grogshop and his wife retired to the wagon and nursed a six-weeks-old baby. Victoria washed the dishes, played around the fire, and, after a time, came hop-skipping through the snowflakes to their canvas-covered home.

"Sister Mollie," announced the child, climbing nimbly up from the tongue, "when I'm big I'm gonna marry a prince, 'n' he won't ever *ever* get drunk 'n' beat me like Rob does you."

"Sh-h-h! You mustn't say such things, Vicky," the older sister admonished.

"'N' I'm gonna have shoes without holes in 'em, 'n' a dress not all patchy, with gold spangles 'most all over it. 'N' he'll have a silver chariot, 'n' great, big, white horses with long tails—not jus' plugs like ours."

Mollie sighed, and caught the baby in her arms tighter, so that for a moment the infant stirred restlessly in his sleep. She, too, had once known dreams of the fairy prince who was to come riding gallantly into her life and to carry her irresistibly into the Land of Romance.

From the tent barroom where her husband had gone came the words of a drunken chorus:

"Exciting times all round the town,
Glory, glory to Washoe,
Stocks are up and stocks are down,
Glory, glory to Washoe.
Washoe! Washoe!
Bound for the land of Washoe,
And I own three feet
In the 'Old Dead Beat,'
And I'm bound for the land of Washoe."

Mollie recognized the voice of her husband and then his tipsy laugh. Her slight body shivered underneath the thin shawl she was wearing.

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT RIDE.

Hugh McClintock drew his horse to a walk and skirted the base of a hill. He patted the shiny neck of the bay affectionately. The boy loved the mounts he rode. His life depended on their stamina and speed, and they had never failed him.

"Good old Nevada Jim," he whispered. "We got a long trail before us through these red devils, but I reckon we're good for it, me 'n' you."

He was swinging well to the south of the Silver Mountains, riding through country covered with brush. He had been traveling at a rapid pace as he wound in and out among the sage and greasewood. Now he

had reached the hills that marked the limit of the range. His intention was to go by way of Alkali Flat, circle Walker Lake, and cross the Walker River range. This plan was subject to change, for at any minute he might run into the Piutes. On the other hand, which was more likely, he might reach Carson without having had a glimpse of them.

Boy though he was, he knew Indians. His father was one of the earliest pioneers in Eagle Valley. Hugh's first recollection was of the trip from Salt Lake through the desert. He recalled that a cow had worked side by side in the wagon with an ox. The first plow that had broken a furrow in Nevada had been made by his father from discarded wagon tires picked up on the overland road to California. He remembered the days when Captain Jim in beads and buckskin and his breech-clothed tribe had hung around the settlers in pretended friendship. Tame coyotes instead of dogs had followed them. There hung in his mind the memory of a morning when he had gone to the stable to find the horses run off and the cows stuck full of arrows.

While he was still in the hills the brilliant reds and crimsons of sunset gave way to the soft violet of dusk, which in turn melted into the deep purple of falling night. Sometimes, as he wound forward in the chaparral, he heard the faint rustling of wild, shy creatures scurrying to safety.

The stars had long been out before he reached Alkali Flat. He was far from any road, but the unerring instinct of the frontiersman took him, with many twists and turns, in the direction he had chosen. Not long after midnight he struck Walker Lake. He followed the shore line around the southern point. On a little peninsula he unsaddled, picketed Nevada Jim, and slept for nearly two hours.

Darkness was still heavy over the land when he resaddled and retied the mail sacks. He crossed Cat Creek, turned northwest, and began the hill trek into the Walker River range. Light began to filter into a sky that grew less opaque. The hills took vague outlines. A meadow lark's piping heralded the advent of the young day.

He put Nevada Jim at the saddle of a hill and reached the brow that formed part of the lip of a small saucer-shaped valley beyond. A score of morning camp fires shone like glow worms in the misty hollow. By chance he had stumbled on a party of Piutes who had probably raided a ranch and come down here to revel undisturbed. Very likely it was the same bunch that had waylaid and shot Tim. There rose to the express rider the pungent smell of burning meat, and he guessed that the Indians were indulging in their favorite feast of roasted horseflesh.

McClintock made to turn back, but as he did so a slim, breech-clothed figure shot up from the sage almost at his stirrup. The rider, silhouetted against the sky line, was a mark hardly to be missed at such close range even by a Piute with a trade gun. Hugh dragged Nevada Jim round with forefeet in air, drove home his spurs, and charged straight at the brave.

A red-hot stab seared McClintock's side. A moment, and he felt the shock of impact. The sentry was flung headlong before the weight of the horse, which staggered over the naked body, trod it under, and went plunging down the hill. Hugh heard guttural shouts of alarm from the valley. Presently, riding along the arroyo below, he saw horsemen urging their mounts over the brow of the hill. A shout of triumph told him that he had been seen by his pursuers.

As the long strides of the horse carried him down the arroyo the boy's brain functioned to meet the emergency. He might turn to the right, circle the lake, make for Alkali Flat, and from there across the hills on the long stretch for the station. The alternative was to keep going north, strike across the range, and point for Carson. Even in this desperate emergency the morale of the service was the deciding factor. The mail was due at Carson in a few hours. With a pressure of his right knee he guided Nevada Jim up the gulch toward a mountain pass he knew above.

If his horse had been fresh, McClintock would have had small fear of the result. The Indians had no such ponies as the one he was astride. Their stock was inferior, just as their rifles were. Moreover, at their best they were wretched marksmen. But all the natural advantages of the white man were neutralized. Nevada Jim was far from fresh. Any rifle was better than none, and the Pony Express rider had to depend on a revolver, good for fast, short-range work but useless now. He was one against many, and already he could feel a wet splash on his shirt when he pressed his hand to his side. How

bad the wound was he did not know, but it was certain that the long, hard ride before him would not add to his strength.

A boy of his age, trained in any other school except the hard outdoor one of the frontier, might have been forgiven for getting panicky under the circumstances. But Hugh wasted no nerve force in fear surges or in self-pity. He had a job to do. He must do it. That was the simple A B C of his reasoning. Quite coolly he set his mind to work on the problem of *how* it was to be done, given the conditions that confronted him. One trouble was that he did not know those conditions. How long could Nevada Jim, after the hard hours of travel that lay between him and the station, keep going at the pace required? Was he himself likely to collapse suddenly, from loss of blood?

His best chance, he decided, lay in the speed of the bay. As soon as he had crossed the range—if he ever got across—he would try to run the Indian ponies off their legs. If they found they could not catch him, the Piutes would give up the chase after a few miles.

The boy looked back. The Indians had swept out of the arroyo and were following him up the gulch. A dozen of them were bunched, with three or four trailing behind. But well in front of the group and going strong was a young brave mounted on a buckskin. At every stride his horse lengthened the distance between him and his companions.

"Big Chief Heap-In-A-Hurry aims to collect me pronto," the boy told himself aloud. "Me, I got different notions. Get a hustle on you, Jim. This is one race where I don't aim to throw down on myself." The horse gave all it had to give, breathing heavily as it plowed up the divide.

McClintock had changed his plans. The young Piute on the buckskin was a factor he could not ignore. It would never do to drop down from the hills with this enemy at his heels. The fresher mount would close in on the bay and the Indian would pick Hugh off at his leisure. It would be better to risk all on a bolder, more decisive stroke.

With voice and knee and the gentle caress of hand, he urged Nevada Jim to his best. "I know, old-timer, it's breakin' yore heart," he pleaded. "But I got to ask it of you—just for a mile or two more, Jim—till we get to the pass. Then that'll be all, if our luck stands up."

Hugh felt his side again and was alarmed at the sogginess of the flannel shirt. The pain of the wound was insistent, but he had no time to worry about that. What troubled him was the loss of blood. He might fall out of the saddle from sheer weakness before he reached safety. He looked back, and faintly grinned. The Indians were beginning to string out, and the gap between the buckskin and the other horses had widened. This was exactly what he wanted.

"Come on, you Buckskin," he shouted softly down the wind. "Don't you stick around with them broomtails."

Nevada Jim's lungs were pumping hard, but the clean, long legs of the horse still reached with long strides for the rising ground, the muscular shoulders moved smoothly and automatically. The head of the divide was close now, scarcely a quarter of a mile in front of the fugitives. Hugh looked back as he galloped up into the pass. The buckskin was far in advance of the other pursuers.

The pass was short and narrow. At the very summit a huge bowlder outcropped from the ridge. McClintock swung his laboring horse back of this and at the same instant leaped to the ground. Swiftly he uncinched and drew the bay close to the flat face of the great rock. For the first time since the wild race had begun he took from its scabbard the navy revolver he carried.

He had not long to wait. There came the sound of a hoof striking the hard quartz of the ridge, then the thud of galloping feet. The express rider tensed his muscles. He was like a coiled spring as he crouched back of the bowlder, a menace to life as deadly as a rattlesnake about to strike. Smoothly he slid round the edge of the rock. The Piute, taken by surprise, jerked the buckskin sideways and tried to raise his rifle. Lightning flashed from McClintock's six-shooter—once, twice. He dived forward and caught the horse. The rifle clattered to the ground.

Hugh took one look at the Indian and wasted no more time on him. He would never steal another horse from the whites. The buckskin, frightened, tried to jerk away. Its new owner spoke gently, soothingly. He coaxed the startled animal to the rock and transferred the saddle from the back of Nevada Jim. Already he could hear approaching horses. As rapidly as possible he cinched and swung astride. Yet an instant, and he was galloping down the western slope.

As he looked back, McClintock saw an Indian's head and the upper part of his body rising and falling with the stride of a horse. He was the first of the pursuers coming up into the pass. There was a shout and the sound of a shot. A bullet struck a spurt of sand from the ground some yards ahead of the express rider. Other shots came, a scattering volley of them. Hugh had thrust his smoking revolver back into the scabbard. He did not attempt to draw it again. The primary business of the moment was to get the buckskin into its stride and widen the distance between him and his enemies.

Soon he was out of range. Bullets were still falling, but they struck the dust behind him. The buckskin was fast and willing. Nevada Jim, like many of the company horses, had a cross of Morgan blood. This horse was a mustang, but it had unusual speed and power. Hugh wondered whether the ranchman who had owned it had been killed when his place was raided.

The pursuit continued for several miles, but the Indians fell always farther to the rear. At last they dropped out. At least Hugh saw them no more. It was time. McClintock was faint and dizzy. He could barely stick to the saddle by clinging with both hands to the pommel. His wound, irritated by the constant motion, hurt a great deal. The fever mounted in his blood.

The amber dawn gave place to clear day. The sun climbed high in the heavens. It was noon when the buckskin picked its way through the East Walker River to the west bank. The boy could go no farther. He slid down, tied the horse, and staggered to the water. An odd, light-headed feeling lifted him from the ground, it seemed. He floated, imponderable, on waves of air resonant with music. Then he passed out of all sensation whatever into unconsciousness.

He came to life again placidly and without energy. When he roused himself to think about it his body was singularly inert. It was almost as though it were a thing apart from himself, did not belong to him at all. He tried heavily with his hand to brush away the cobwebs from his mind. Then slowly he remembered what had taken place.

The buckskin was still standing patiently beside the willow to which he had tied it. The sun was beginning to slant from the west. Slowly he undressed himself in part, washed the wound with clean water, and tied it up with a bandage torn from his clothing. His fever was high, and he bathed his face in the cold water fresh from the mountain snows.

Somehow he reached the buckskin and pulled himself to the saddle. He held the pony to a walk, because this jolted his side less than any other gait. His mind refused to consider the long hours he must spend on the rack of torture. Every moment was sufficient to itself. He would set landmarks for himself. That scrub cottonwood by the river must be passed. When that had been reached a bunch of greasewood ahead became his goal. So, mile by mile, in a growing delirium, he kept going till he was far up in the Pine Nut range.

He lost count of time and of distance. He forgot where he was traveling or why. He remembered only Indians, and the fear he had resolutely repressed—which, no doubt, had been uppermost all the time in the boy's subconscious mind—expressed itself in the babbling of his delirious talk.

"They're roostin' up there in the hills somewheres. Sure are. Want my topknot for to decorate their tepees. Hump yoreself, you Nevada Jim. I feel right spindlin', an' I want mother to fix me up some sage tea. They're after me full jump. See 'em come licketty split. Aimin' to scalp me, all on account that I didn't stop to say 'Howdy.'" His laughter jangled in the empty desert, fear for the moment forgotten. "We ce'tainly lit a-runnnin', me an' you, Jim, when we jumped up them Piutes. Clumb for the tall timber, didn't we, amigo viego? Never did see mountains dance before. S'lute yore pardners. Grand right an' left. Alemane. Here the devils come, hell for leather. Better not crawl our humps, eh, Jim. We'll sure show 'em what for."

It was the buckskin that saved him, that and the terror which had become an obsession. He clung to the saddle desperately, long after he no longer knew the reason for it, long after he had ceased to guide his mount. Just before nightfall the horse took him to a Mormon ranch, the same one from which the Indians had stolen it. A comfortable-looking matron, feeding her chickens, looked up to see the horse and its load motionless before her.

"Lands sake!" she ejaculated, amazed; then raised her voice in a shout to her husband. "Father, come here! Buckskin has come home and——"

She broke off to run to McClintock's aid. He had slid from the saddle to the ground.

"You poor boy," she cried. "You're all shot up. You're dead, I guess. It's them Piutes. Help me get him into the house, father."

With a ghost of a smile the wounded boy reassured her.

CHAPTER IV.

SCOT M'CLINTOCK INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

Mark Twain tells us that in the early Nevada days it gave a man no permanent satisfaction to shoot an enemy through both lungs because the dry air was so exhilarating the wounded foe was soon as good as new. Hugh McClintock was an illustration of this. He reached the Mormon settlement a white-faced rag of humanity. But he had lived hard and clean. The wind and the sun and able-bodied forbears had given him a constitution tough as hammered brass. When his brother Scot drove from Virginia City to see him, having heard the news that Hugh was wounded to death, he found the boy wrapped in a blanket and sitting in the sunshine at the corner of the ranch house. This was just a week after the end of the younger brother's wild ride.

"'Lo, Hugh! How are cases?" asked Scot, his gay smile beaming down at the boy.

"Fine as silk, Scot. I got an appetite like a bear. Sorry you had to come so far."

"I hooked up soon as I heard about it, old f'ler. Now I've seen you, I feel a lot better. The way I heard it, you were ready to cash your chips."

Scot's arm was round the lad's shoulder. The half caress, the light in the fine eyes, the warmth of the voice, all told of the strong affection the older brother had for the younger. Hugh repaid this love with interest. In his eyes Scot was an Admirable Crichton, the most wonderful man he had ever been privileged to know. He trod the earth a king among his race—and the king could do no wrong.

No two sons of the same father and mother could have been more unlike than these. The last born was counted steady as a six-day clock, reliable as tested steel. The other walked wild and forbidden paths. Yet to call them unlike is to tell a half truth. They had in common courage, a certain cleanness of fiber, and an engaging gayety. Scot McClintock was nearly ten years older than Hugh, but there was a remarkable physical resemblance between them. Each had inherited from a Scotch father eyes of the same color, a square-cut chin, and a strong Roman nose. The head of each was crowned with curls of russet gold.

The shoulders of Scot were broader, his figure less stringy. He was of splendid physique, tall, compact, powerful. Bearing himself with manly grace, he radiated vitality. His chin told the truth. He was indomitably resolute, a born leader. Vanity was his weakness. The spectacular appealed. It had been said of him that he would rather break down a door than wait for a key.

The self-esteem of the man expressed itself in clothes. These he wore always for effect, with the knowledge that his fine figure would win him envy and admiration, even though he affected the dandy. In his frock coat of doeskin, with its flaring skirt and broad lapels, his fancy vest cut wide to show a frilled shirt and blue satin necktie, his pegtop trousers, his immaculately varnished boots, and his flat-crowned silk derby, he was out of question the Beau Brummel of Washoe. Another might have been laughed at for this punctilious devotion to dress, but even in Virginia City nobody was hardy enough to poke fun at Scot McClintock.

Many smiled with him, for this blue-eyed gambler had a thousand friends. It was in his horoscope to fight or share his last dollar with you, gladly. He did not care which. He could be brave, reckless, generous, sociable, or witty. Nobody could ever say that he was mean-spirited.

"I'm going to take you back with me as soon as you can travel, Hugh," he said.

"That'll be to-morrow mo'ning."

"Sure you can stand the jolting yet?"

"Sure. Ask 'Mother' Jessup here."

The rancher's wife had come out from the house and been introduced to Scot. Now she smiled comfortably at her patient. "He's doing fine."

"He would, with you looking after him, madam," Scot answered gallantly.

"It's a God's mercy he stuck on all those miles, wounded the way he was. I don't see how he ever did," Mrs. Jessup said.

"I reckon he clamped his teeth on the job. Hugh's right obstinate when he gets set," the older brother said with affectionate pride.

"Runs in the family," Hugh cut back, grinning.

They started on their journey next morning, made a short day of it on account of Hugh's wound, and put up at Carson for the night.

On what had been known as Eagle Ranch, in the valley of the same name, the town of Carson had been built. During the previous decade both Eagle and Carson valleys had served as a refuge for those who ran off stolen stock from San Francisco and other California points. In these hidden parks the outlaws had been accustomed to rest and feed the herds before making the desert trip by obscure routes to Salt Lake. But those days were past. Carson now had two thousand inhabitants, a boom in town lots, and a civic consciousness. It had become respectable, though guns still flashed frequently. Already it was laying political wires to become the capital of Nevada, the "battle-born" State.

Through Carson supplies came by way of Mormon Station for the diggings at Virginia, along a road which wound around the base of the hills. As Scot drove in, the air was musical with chimes. Some of these came soft and mellow from a great distance. Each mule of the freight outfits had a circlet of bells suspended in a steel bow above its collar. They made music as they moved.

At the hay corral, into which McClintock drove, scores of outfits were gathered, most of them freighters to or from the diggings. A dozen others could be heard jingling in from one direction or the other. The winter had been a severe one and hundreds of cattle in the adjacent valley had died for lack of feed. Hay was scarce. There was a very strong demand for it to feed the freight outfits. Just now the price was three hundred dollars a ton. Ranchers found it far more profitable to let their cattle rustle on bunch grass and take a chance of roughing through than to feed hay worth such a price. Wherefore all the native hay went to the stock hauling supplies.

Scot hailed "Baldy" Green, a well-known stage driver. "How about places up on the stage for me and Hugh to-morrow, old-timer?"

Baldy rubbed the top of his shiny head and grinned at him. "Full up. Like to ditch a couple of my passengers for you if I could—a jewelry peddler and a sky pilot. But I don't reckon I can, Scot."

The eyes of the older McClintock sparkled. "Show 'em to me, Baldy."

Three minutes later the Beau Brummel of Virginia City might have been seen in earnest conversation with a clergyman who hailed from Buffalo, New York. He was telling the story of the Indian attack upon his brother and making certain deductions from it. His manner of grave deference was perfect.

"But bless my soul, do you really think the redskins are likely to attack the stage to-morrow?" asked the startled missionary.

"Can't tell, sir. They were certainly heading this way when last seen. Big chance of it, I'd say. I'm a sinner—a professional gambler. What does it matter about me? But you—the only minister of the gospel in a hundred miles—you can't be spared. The harvest is ripe for the reaper. Why not wait here a day or two and make sure the Piutes are not around?"

The missionary was frankly frightened, but he had in him the stuff of heroes. His lower lip became a thin, straight line of resolution. No professional gambler should put his courage to shame. If he rode through the valley of the shadow, he had a promise from Holy Writ to comfort him.

"I'll go if the stage goes," he said stoutly.

Scot McClintock knew when he was beaten temporarily. But he was not the man to give up a point upon which he had set his heart. He looked up a friend of his, the mayor of the town, drew him aside, and whispered persuasively in his ear.

The fat little man with whom he talked exploded a protest. "But dog-gone it, Scot, if the gospel shark accepts won't I have to go to his meetin'?"

"Maybe so. What of it? Be a good scout, Adams. I want that boy of mine to get up to Virginia to-morrow so that I can make him comfortable."

The mayor grinned. "Never saw your beat for gettin' your own way. All right. I'll rustle up some of the women and ask him."

Scot dropped into the What Cheer House and glanced around. The jewelry salesman was sitting in a corner by himself. McClintock introduced himself and invited the stranger to a rum cocktail or a whisky sling. In five minutes he knew all about the peddler's business and how much he hoped to make from the sale of his stock at Virginia.

"But why not sell it here in Carson? The town's booming. Lots of money here. More women. Up in Virginia they can't think anything except mines," Scot suggested.

"My friendt, I make more at Virginia."

"Well, you know your business better than I do. Hope we get through without trouble."

"Trouble? Vat kind of trouble?"

"Injuns on warpath. They shot up my brother. I'm taking him up with me to a doctor. From the way the Piutes were heading I rather expect an attack on the stage to-morrow."

The peddler rose to the bait, excitedly, with shrill voice. "And I haf paid my fare to Virginia. It's an outrage. I vill demand a refund. I vill sue the company. I vill nodt travel in onsavety. You are right, my friendt. I sell my stock right here in Carson, if I get a refund."

"I would," agreed McClintock sympathetically. "I know Baldy Green. Let's see if he'll stand for the refund."

The stage driver played up to his friend with a serious face. It was not customary to make refunds. He had a kind of hunch the stage would get through without being attacked. But if the gentleman wanted to stay at Carson and if McClintock would guarantee him against loss to the company, through an empty seat, probably it could be arranged. Incidentally he mentioned that he had just heard from the clergyman canceling his passage. He had been urged by a deputation of Carson citizens to stay in town over Sunday and preach on the plaza. This call he felt could not be ignored.

Baldy called Scot back as he was leaving. The stage driver's face was one wrinkled grin. "You ce'tainly take the cake, old alkali. I got to give it to you. Afraid the stage will be attacked, are you? Dad gum yore hide, you know Injuns won't dare come up here on the peck."

"I'd hate to have the jewelry gentleman take any chances," Scot explained.

"And preachin' on the plaza. Don't you know there's hawss racin' here every Sunday?" cackled Baldy.

"Competition is the life of trade. The ladies can meet an' pray for their wicked husbands. They need it, don't they?"

"Sure do. Well, I got no kick comin'. I won't be here Sunday."

Neither was Scot. He and his brother traveled Virginiaward in the morning. The "mud wagon" had been left at Carson. They traveled in a beautiful painted Concord stage behind six high-stepping chestnuts decked with ivory rings, silver tassels, and expensive harness.

Baldy drove superbly. He and his kind were the knights of the road. The wranglers and attendants were deferential to them, the public viewed them admiringly as celebrities. Baldy drew on his gauntlets slowly, mounted to the box, and took the ribbons from the hand of a hostler. There was a swift tightening of the reins, a sweeping crash of the whip. The leaders came round on the run, the swings at a gallop, and the wheelers at a trot.

The ride to Virginia was one worth taking. The road wound round curves, dropped into draws, swept along dugways beneath which were deep precipices. When he hit the curves Baldy gave the wheels play. Occasionally one of the back ones hung precariously over space. A minute later, the stage perhaps had struck a level and the driver was riding the brakes while the horses dashed wildly forward. Ten miles an hour, uphill and down, over the precipitous mountain road, the chestnuts traveled wildly, every foot of the way guided by the man on the box who handled them so coolly and so expertly. Meanwhile, Baldy discussed casually with Scot McClintock the news of the day. With his whip he pointed to a bad turn.

"Hank Monk went over the grade yesterday—coach, hawsses and passengers."

"Much damage?"

"Nope—none a-tall. Nary a beast skinned. Paint on coach hardly scratched. Busted one tenderfoot's laig. That's all. Mighty lucky spill. Hank always did fall on his feet. Been me I'd prob'ly a-hurted one of the animals."

The long whip snaked out with a crack like the sound of an exploding gun. The coach leaped forward, swaying like a crâdle set on wheels. They were drawing close to Virginia now and the whole desert was staked like the sole of a giant shoe. American Flat fell away to the rear. The chestnuts raced up Gold Hill and the Ophir Grade, across the divide, and down into Virginia City, which was perched on the lower slope of Mount Davidson. The town was an uncouth and windswept camp, but it represented uncounted hopes and amazing energy. In this mass of porphyry lay the fabulously

rich Comstock Lode, from which in a single generation nearly a billion dollars' worth of ore was to be taken.

The Concord dropped down into B Street, the horses covering the home stretch at a gallop. Baldy brought the coach along the rough street at a dead run, sweeping it skillfully around a train of wood-packed burros. He stopped exactly in front of the company's office, twined the reins around the brake bar, and smiled at Scot.

"Yore friend the peddler will feel sold when he hears you wasn't scalped."

"The scenery flew past so fast I couldn't tell whether it was punctuated with Piutes or not," said Scot genially as he swung down to help Hugh from inside.

The younger McClintock stepped out stiffly.

"Hope I didn't mix yore inside geography too much?" Baldy asked him.

"I'm all right. The docs say the inside of a stagecoach is first rate for the inside of a man," Hugh answered.

"Tha's right, too—for a well man; but they don't say it's a sure cure for one the Injuns have been playin' with, do they? Well, so long, young fellow. Don't you let that rip-snortin' brother o' yours c'rupt you none."

CHAPTER V.

SCOT PASSES THE HAT.

Through the throngs that crowded not only the dilapidated sidewalks, but also the street itself, Scot guided his brother deftly toward the hotel. The whole appearance of the place was still higgledy-piggledy. Men lived in tents, in dugouts, in prospect holes, in shacks built of dry-goods boxes, canvas sacks, and brush. They cooked and ate as best they could, while they went about their business of prospecting or buying and selling "feet," in what by courtesy were called mines.

"We'll cut across this lot," the gambler suggested.

A mud-stained wagon with a dirty canvas top had been unhitched close to the street. Two bony and dejected horses were tied to the wheels, eating at some brush they were trying to persuade themselves was hay. Hugh commented on the broom tails: "So thin they won't throw a shadow."

A moment later he was sorry, for as they rounded the wagon he saw a woman and child crouched over a camp fire. They were cooking a stew. A man sat on the wagon tongue smoking. He looked at the passing men out of sullen, clouded eyes.

A voice from the sidewalk drifted to the brothers. "Trouble, looks like. Sam Dutch has got Red Mike backed up against the bar of the Mile High, and he's tryin' to devil him into drawing a six-shooter."

On the heels of the words there came the sound of a shot, followed by a second. A swift trampling of many feet, and the side door of the Mile High burst open. Men poured out of it, as seeds are squirted from a pressed lemon. They dived in every direction to escape. After them came a single man, bareheaded, a revolver in his hand. He looked wildly round, then fled to the shelter of the wagon for safety. A huge man, bellowing like a bull, tore out of the saloon in pursuit.

An ironclad rule of the old fighting West is that every quarrel is a private one. No outsider has any right to interfere. Under ordinary conditions the first impulse of the McClintocks would have been to dive for cover. The West considers it no reflection on a man's courage for him to sing small when guns are out to settle a difference of opinion which is no concern of his.

The McClintocks, as though moved by the same spring, wheeled in their tracks and ran back to the wagon. The man on the tongue was disappearing into the bed through the opening in the canvas. But the woman and the little girl, terror-stricken, stood spellbound beside the fire. Pursued and pursuer were charging straight toward them. A bullet struck with a metallic clang the iron pot in the live coals. The child screamed.

Roughly the woman and the little girl went down at the same instant, flung to the ground by the impact of flying bodies. They heard more shots, but they knew nothing of what was going on. For the McClintock brothers were crouched above them, shielding them from the danger of wild bullets. They did not see the red-headed man stumble and pitch forward, nor did they see the big ruffian at his heels fling shot after shot into his prostrate form.

Hugh released his weight from the child and lifted her to her feet in such a way that her face was turned from the tragedy.

"Run right along into the wagon, li'l' girl, and don't turn yore head," he said, and his voice was very gentle.

She moved forward, whimpering as she

went, and climbed to the wagon tongue. But, just as she was about to vanish inside, curiosity or some other impulse swung round her black and shaggy little head. Big, dark eyes fastened on Hugh, then moved past him to the awful thing she was to see in her dreams for many a night. A man, red-haired and red-bearded, lay face up on the ground, sightless eyes staring up at the blue sky. A second man straddled the body with brutal triumph, a big, slouchy fellow with coarse, tawny hair reaching to his neck and sandy whiskers tied under his chin. He wore a brown, Peruvian hat, a blue army overcoat with a cape, and a woolen shirt. From his bootleg a horn-handled bowie knife projected.

"Wanted to be chief,* eh?" the murderer jeered in a heavy, overbearing voice. "There'll be only one chief in Virginia while Sam Dutch is here. If any one else wants the job, he'll get his like Red Mike did." He shuffled away, Spanish spurs jingling, heavy and slow of movement, except when shooting.

A faint trickle of smoke still issued from the barrel of his revolver as he thrust it back into its scabbard, where it could be seen beneath the flapping coat tails. He disappeared into the Mile High and proceeded to down half a dozen gin slings at the expense of friends who did not dare withhold this tribute of admiration lest he make one of them number eleven on his list.

An hour later Scot McClintock saw him there in drunken slumber, lying on a billiard table, the brute primordial, first among the bad men of the lawless camp because he was its most deadly ruffian. There were those who would have liked to make an end of him as he lay soddenly asleep, but he was so quick and terrible that their fear was greater than the lust to kill.

Scot helped from the ground the woman he had thrown. She looked at him, her breast rising and falling deep, fear still quick in the soft, brown eyes. Her cheeks were white as the snow on Mount Davidson.

"Madam, I'm sorry I was rough," Scot said, and gave her the most gallant bow in Washoe. "But you were in the line of fire. I couldn't take chances."

Emotion shook her. A faint color crept timidly into her face. She said, in a voice hardly audible: "You saved my life."

"I wouldn't go that far," the man answered, smiling.

Something eager, beautiful, made of the woman's eyes soft stars of light. "I'll never forget—never," she promised, with a strangled sob.

There was a low, jangling laugh at her shoulder. "Tha's right. Always a fool, if you can find a chance to be one, Moll," a voice sneered. The light died from the woman's eyes, the color from her cheeks. She became at once a creature lifeless, without spirit.

Scot turned, voice soft and suave. "Did you find what you went to look for in the wagon, sir?" he asked, raking the unkempt, unclean emigrant with scornful eyes.

A dull flush burned into the man's face. A furtive, darting look slid from the yellow-gray eyes. It carried menace, as does sometimes that of a tamed wolf toward its trainer.

"I—I didn't notice where Moll was when I started," he said with sullen reluctance. "An' I reckon tha's *my* business."

"Quite so," agreed the gambler.

He bowed again to the woman in the cheap, patched homespun, met the eyes of his brother, and turned to go. From the wagon came a weak little wail. The McClintocks stood rooted in their tracks. Again the puling cry was raised. With a curtsy the woman excused herself hurriedly and climbed into the covered wagon.

"Have you got a baby there?" asked Scot, a new note in his voice.

The father grunted a sulky "Yes."

"A baby, Hugh. An honest-to-God baby. The first in Virginia City. What do you think about that?"

"Could we see it, do you reckon?" the younger brother asked eagerly.

Scot turned on him reproving eyes. "I'm surprised at you, Hugh. That baby's being —fed—right now." Suddenly he wheeled on the emigrant. "Boy or girl?"

"Girl."

"Great! We'll call her Virginia."

"Her name's Susan," the father growled.

"No matter. We'll change it. Last name?"

* It was a matter of pride among the desperadoes of Nevada in early days to be cock of the walk. Many a "bad man" died with his boots on because he aspired to be "chief" among his fellows. So long as these ruffians killed each other the community paid little attention to their murders. When good citizens fell victims a sentiment was created which resulted in the supremacy of law. W. M. R.

"Dodson. Her name's goin' to stay right what it is now."

A crowd of men had poured upon the vacant lot to view the scene of the killing. Some were removing the body to an adjacent saloon, others were discussing the affair guardedly from its dramatic and not from its ethical standpoint. There was no question of ethics in an ordinary killing, if both combatants had had ample warning. It was the boast of Virginia, just as it was later of Austin, Pioche, Aurora, and the other Nevada camps, that it had "a man for breakfast" each day. This was not the literal truth, but it was too nearly true for comfort. The diggings were infested with wild, lawless criminals driven from more settled communities. They robbed stages, held up citizens, and maintained the rule of the six-gun among communities the vast majority of whose residents would much have preferred peace and order.

Scot climbed into the bed of an empty ore wagon and clapped his hands for silence. Only those in his immediate vicinity heard him, wherefore Scot got what he wanted by the simple expedient of firing his revolver into the air.

For a moment there was the threat of a stampede, but not after the discovery that McClintock had fired the gun. Scot was known as a professional gambler, a respectable business man who did not kill wantonly. It was evident that he wanted to make a speech. Anything in reason that Scot McClintock wanted in Virginia City he could have. He was the most popular man in camp.

"Go to it, Scot. Onload heap much oration," some one shouted.

After which there was silence.

"Boys," Scot began simply, "I'm going to tell you something that will please you a lot. We've got a baby in camp, a real, genuwine, blown-in-the-bottle, guaranteed baby, the first one that ever hit Virginia City. It's a lady baby, and her name's Susan. Now, we've none of us got anything against Susan. It's a good name. But it's not the name for our baby. We're going to name that kid Virginia or know why."

A wild howl of approval lifted into the air. The emotions of Washoe were direct and primitive. This was the sort of thing that made its sure appeal. These men were far from their womenkind and the ties of home. Many of them had slipped into ways that would have shocked their sheltered relatives in older communities. But they were sentimental as schoolgirls. A baby was the symbol of all the happiness they had left behind when they undertook the lonesome hardships of gold hunting. They cheered and shouted and shook hands with each other in deep delight.

"We're going to give this kid a good send-off because she's our baby. Virginia is her name and Virginia is her home. I'm going to pass the hat, boys. You, El Dorado Johnnie, and Jean Poulette and Six-fingered Pete and Murphy Davis, get your hats off and circulate among these Washoe millionaires and bummers. Dig deep into your jeans, every last one of you. We're going to do the right thing by this little lady the good Lord has sent us. Whoop 'er up now."

From every direction men came running to this new form of entertainment. Saloons and gambling houses emptied. The streets began to pack. Still the jingling of coins dropping into hats could be heard. Everybody gave. Scot appointed a committee to count the spoils and another committee to invite the town's brass band down to the reception. Meanwhile he whispered in Hugh's ear and the boy carried a message to the prairie schooner.

"I want to see Mrs. Dodson," he told that lady's husband.

The dull unimaginative face of the man was lit with cupidity and suspicion. It surely was not possible that all this money was going to be turned over to him just because he had a baby. The world couldn't possibly be so full of fools. Yet it looked like it. He called his wife.

She came out to the tent flap with the baby in her arms. All this noise and confusion frightened her a little, but it did not disturb the tousled little girl by her side. It was meat and drink to her. Her eyes snapped with excitement. She had an inkling of what was going on, and she wriggled like a small pleased puppy.

Hugh took off his hat. "Madam, we'd like to borrow for a little while yore family. We're figurin' on a sort of a parade, and we want the baby in it. We'd like to have you an' the li'l' girl go along to see the baby's taken care of proper."

"Goody, goody!" Victoria hopped from one foot to the other as a register of approval.

The woman hesitated. Her glance fluttered timidly to the husband. "I don't know. What do you think, Rob?" Then, in a low voice: "I haven't anything to wear. Perhaps you could take baby."

The boy interposed hurriedly. "That's not quite the idea, ma'am. The boys are kinda hungry to see a sure-enough mother and baby. It would be a kindness to them if you'd come yoreself. We'll have the stage, an' you can ride beside the driver. O' course we don't aim to be bossy about it, but our hearts are real set on this." He smiled, and Hugh's boyish grin was a winsome argument. It had the touch of sweet deference women liked. "They're rough looking, ma'am, but none of these miners would hurt you for the world. It's a celebration for the camp's first baby."

"Oh, le's go, sister Mollie," urged Victoria. "I wanta ride in the pee-rade."

The woman whispered with her husband. He broke out roughly. "Don't be so damned finicky. Your dress is all right."

"We'll come," the young woman told the boy. "In a few minutes we'll be ready. And thank you for wanting us."

Scot McClintock presently arrived himself and escorted the guests of honor to the stage. He assisted the young mother to the seat beside Baldy and passed the baby up to her. The infant was a plump little thing with fat, dimpled arms and legs. It crowed up into Scot's face and gurgled happily at him. Vicky was lifted up to the seat next her sister.

As master of ceremonies Scot, in a long, red sash, mounted on a beautiful white horse, rode at the head of the procession. The stage came next, followed by Virginia's young and exuberant brass band. After this marched the fire organizations in their red shirts and helmets. Empty ore wagons fell into line and were quickly filled with miners. A mixed crowd of residents on foot brought up the rear.

The contributions already collected had been poured from the hats into a tub. This was tied to the back of the stage, in the place where trunks and packages usually rested. All along A Street and back along B Street men fought to get at the tub with their money. The band played "Old Dan Tucker" and other popular airs, but out of deference to a divided public opinion did not give either "Yankee Doodle" or "Dixie."* There were speeches, of course, full of bombast, eloquence, and local patriotism, all of which were vociferously applauded.

It was while the band was playing that the guest of honor began to cry.

"Stop that darned band and give the kid a chance," some one shouted.

A hundred light-hearted sons of mirth took up the word. The band stopped in the middle of a bar, and to her mother's embarrassment Miss Virginia Dodson entertained with a solo. The marshal of the parade rode back to the coach and smiled up at the young mother.

"Don't mind the boys," he advised. "It's just their way of showing how much they think of our baby. You know, ma'am, this town claims the young lady. We've adopted her, but if you say 'Please' real nice, we'll let you bring her up."

Mollie's bosom warmed within her. A lump rose in her throat and her eyes misted. For years she had been the chattel of Robert Dodson, a creature to be sneered at, derided, and beaten. This splendid-looking hero of romance treated her as though she were a lady. She wondered who he could be. Among all these rough-bearded miners he shone like a diamond in a mud heap. His clothes, manner, speech, the musical intonation of his voice, all set him apart from other men, she thought, even if his figure and face had not marked him for distinction.

A big blond lawyer with a long, yellow beard was at the head of the committee appointed to count the money. His name was William M. Stewart. Later he represented Nevada in the United States Senate for many years. At the request of Scot McClintock he made the presentation speech, the baby in his arms at the time. The total amount collected ran over thirty-two hundred dollars.

Robert Dodson had been drinking more or less all day. He had taken the opportunity to celebrate rather steadily during the parade, since as father of Virginia he had been offered a nip at many bottles. Now he unwisely presented himself to take charge of the fund raised.

*The Civil War was being fought at this time, and, though Nevada was far from the scene of action, sectional feeling was high. A fairly large minority of those in Virginia City and Carson were Southerners. W. M. R.

Stewart looked at him carefully, then exchanged glances with Scot.

"Friends," said the future senator, "I move a committee of three to take charge of Miss Virginia's educational fund. If this is satisfactory, I shall ask the citizens of the camp to name the trustees."

It was so voted. When the time came to name the custodians of the fund the crowd shouted "McClintock" and "Stewart."

The big blond lawyer consulted with Scot. "Mr. McClintock and I are glad to serve as trustees in your behalf, gentlemen," announced Stewart. "With your permission we shall name Robert Dodson, the father of Virginia, as the third member."

In the months that followed Dodson flew into a rage whenever the trust fund was mentioned. He insinuated to his cronies over the bar that McClintock and Stewart were manipulating the money to their own advantage. The fact was, of course, that they refused to let their cotrustee get his fingers on any of it to dissipate.

CHAPTER VI.

HUGH SITS IN.

From every State and many nations the pioneers of California had come, young, ardent, hopeful, strong. Round the Horn in clipper ships, across the fever-swept Isthmus, by way of the long Overland Trail, they poured into the Golden West. They laughed at hardship. They wrote songs of defiance to bad luck and sang them while they worked and starved and died. Self-contained and confident, they gutted mountains, made deserts leafy green, built cities that were the marvel of their generation. To these sunset shores came the pick of the world's adventurous youth.

Nevada absorbed the best and the worst of California's seasoned veterans. Gay, reckless, debonair, the gold-seekers went their turbulent way. Every man was a law to himself, carried in his holster the redress for wrongs. The wildest excesses prevailed. The most brutal crimes went unpunished. For years there was no night at Virginia, at Austin, or at Eureka. The flare from dance halls, hurdy-gurdys, and gambling houses flung splashes of light on masses of rughly dressed men engaged in continual revelry.

But it would be unjust to condemn Washoe,* because it did not measure up to standards of Philadelphia. At its worst no good woman was ever more revered than here, no child's innocence more zealously guarded. And, as it proved, the strength of the bad man lacked the endurance of the one who was good. Law and order came to Nevada, brought by stalwarts who took their lives in their hands to punish desperadoes.

The dominance of law came slowly, because Washoe was under the jurisdiction of Utah, so far away across the desert that its authority was only a shadow. Until this handicap was taken away no real civil authority was possible.

The earliest mining at Virginia was done from the grass roots, which fact accounts largely for the character of its population. Six-Mile Cañon heads on the north side of Mount Davidson, Gold Cañon about a mile distant on its south slope. Placer miners, working among the decomposed rock and gravel of the ravines, moved up toward the mother lode without knowing it. The clay in which they dug was so tough it had to be "puddled" in water with shovels.

But the formation of the strata had convinced the astute that the Washoe diggings were a quartz proposition. The rocker and the long tom had had their day. Into the Ophir, and the Gould & Curry, steam hoists had been put. The shafts were going deeper every hour. Much litigation developed, due in part to defective location work and disputes as to veins. This brought to the territory the ablest bar on the Pacific coast. Among the newspaper reporters who worked a few months later on the *Territorial Enterprise* was Mark Twain. He was one of a dozen brilliant writers who later were known from coast to coast, all of whom were associated with the Goodwins on this paper.

No other such mining camp ever existed. Side by side with lawlessness and the roughest makeshifts there existed a high civilization which was satisfied with nothing less than the best. In the days to come, after the town had found its feet, McCullough, Booth and Barrett and Modjeska played at Piper's Opera House within a stone's throw of the raucous uproar of the hurdy-gurdy houses. One lucky miner expressed himself in a mansion equipped with doorsteps of gold and doorknobs of silver; an-

* Nevada was commonly known as Washoe until its admission as a territory under the Spanish name. W. M. R.

other lifted his eyes to the stars and wrote his soul out with fire-tipped pen.

In this heterogeneous society there was at first no class consciousness. The professional gambler had a special standing. He was accepted as necessary to the community, much as a doctor or a merchant was. He set the standard of dress and of manners. If he was a "square sport" he played a fair game. The most distinguished men in the camp were glad to sit down at poker with such a gambler as Scot McClintock.

So long as the road from California was open, Virginia City lived on the best that could be imported. But, during the heavy winter just ending, the trail had been closed for months. Food was dangerously short. The supply of potatoes and onions, the staple vegetables, had become completely exhausted. There was very little fresh meat, though jack rabbits were fortunately plentiful. To make conditions worse, soft, heavy, spring snows blocked the passes and made transportation impossible. At Placerville and at Strawberry Flat great trains of supplies waited for the opening of the trail.

On a sunny, wind-swept afternoon, Scot McClintock made his way from the International Hotel to the Crystal Palace, where he dealt faro to a high-priced clientele. He was pleasantly at peace with the world. If he carried a derringer in his pocket it was as a concession to the custom of a country where every man went armed. His progress along B Street and through the Crystal Palace to his seat was in the nature of a reception, for everybody knew Scot.

He nodded to the players, slid into his chair, and began to deal. His face took on the gambler's mask of impassivity. This mask did not lift when a heavy-set, huge man slouched into the Crystal Palace and to the corner where McClintock presided. Some one hastily moved aside to give the newcomer a place. Nobody in Virginia City disputed any question of precedence with Sam Dutch.

The desperado had been drinking. It was apparent to all that he was in an ugly humor. Gradually, inconspicuously, the players at that end of the hall cashed in their chips and departed from the immediate vicinity. Scot continued to deal with a wooden face, but behind his expressionless eyes was a wary intentness. Dutch meant trouble. He had come with the deliberate intention of making it.

Friends had brought to McClintock the word that he had better look out for Dutch. The bad man was jealous of his popularity, his influence in the camp, and, above all, of the fearlessness that would not accept intimidation. Shrewdly, with that instinct for safety common to all killers, the fellow had chosen his moment well. All the advantage would lie with him. The hands of the dealer must be above the table sliding out cards. His own could be on the butts of his six-shooters before he called for a show-down. What Dutch proposed was not a duel, but deliberate, cold-blooded murder.

Scot knew this. He knew, too, that if either of his hands lifted for an instant from the cards, the ruffian opposite would fling slug after slug into his body. Nor could he expect any help from the lookout for the game. Dutch sent his shots too straight to tempt interference.

The roulette wheel continued to turn. The stud and draw poker games went on. Automatically men made their bets, but the interest was gone from their play. The atmosphere had grown electric. The furtive attention of everybody focused on two men, the killer and the victim he had selected. When would Dutch find his excuse to strike? In the tenseness of the suspense throats parched and nerves grew taut.

The contrast between the two men was striking. The one dealing the cards was clean-cut, graceful, and lithe as a tiger. From head to foot he was trim and well-groomed. Even the finger nails were polished pink, in the latest San Francisco fashion. The huge man in front of him was dirty, his hair and beard unkempt, his figure slouchy. The long, army overcoat he wore was splashed with mud. He looked the incarnation of brute force dominated by craft instead of intelligence.

Into the Crystal Palace a lean, sun-and-wind-browned man walked. He was about to start back to take his run on the Pony Express, and he had come in to say good-by to his brother. With one clear-eyed, steady look he realized the situation. The gunman had not yet called for a show-down. He meant to choose his own time for fastening the quarrel on Scot. His rage might still be diverted into another channel.

Hugh did his thinking as he moved lightly forward. There was not a break in his stride as he walked straight to the faro table. Carelessly, it appeared, but really by cool

design, he chose the place next to Dutch, close to him and on his right.

"Don't crowd, young fella," warned the bully heavily. "Me, when I play, I want room a-plenty."

The Pony Express rider tossed a twenty-dollar gold piece on the table. "Chips," he said, without even looking at Dutch.

The eyes of the McClintocks met. Hugh was no gambler. He was sitting in, Scot knew, to share and lessen the risk. If he could draw the gunman's attention for even an instant, at the critical moment, it might save the dealer's life. A stack of chips slid across to the boy.

The big ruffian slammed a fist like a ham down so that the chips jumped. "Didja hear me speak, kid? Know who I am?" he blustered.

The sun streamed full on the boy's fair, curly head from the window above. It brought out the faint golden down on his lean cheek and emphasized a certain cherubic innocence of gaze that still lingered from his childhood.

"Why, no, I don't reckon I do."

"I'm Sam Dutch."

Hugh coppered two of the big man's bets and played the jack to win. "Knew a fellow called Dutch once—hanged for stealing sheep from the Mormons. No kin, maybe," he said cheerfully.

The lookout stirred uneasily, then stepped from the place where he sat and disappeared through a side door. The cards slid out of the box. Hugh won both bets he had coppered. Scot sized up chips to match the bets and the boy drew them in with his left hand.

Dutch turned to him a face distorted as a gargoyle. "Play yore own game and keep offn the cards I play, An' don't get heavy with me," he snarled with an oath.

"Sure not," Hugh promised amiably. "It was down on the Humboldt Sink they hanged him, I recollect."

The bad man thrust his unkempt head closer. "Get outa here. You're crowdin' me. I don't want my private graveyard to hold no kid-size coffins."

"Room for both of us," said Hugh coolly, and he did not give a fraction of an inch. Instead, he coppered another of the camp bully's bets, playing the ace to lose.

"Not room for me an' you here both. I tell you I'm Sam Dutch."

Scot slid out the cards. The ace lost.

"Yes, I heard you—no need to shout," Hugh said tranquilly, reaching for his winnings.

Dutch brushed his arm aside roughly. He raked in the chips. "I'll collect on that ace," he announced.

"You played it to win and it lost," Hugh told him.

"Did I?" The killer was dangerously near explosion point. "Don't forget, young fella, that I'm chief in this town."

Hugh looked straight at him, his blue eyes narrowed ever so little. "So? Who elected you?"

This cool defiance from an unknown, smooth-cheeked boy put the match to the ruffian's rage. He snatched from his head the Peruvian hat and stamped it under his feet. His teeth ground savagely. He stooped as though to leap, and, as he did so, his fingers closed on the horn handle of the bowie projecting from his boot leg. The long blade flashed in the sunlight.

Almost simultaneously a derringer and a navy revolver flamed.

A stupid puzzled expression gathered on the face of the man in the army overcoat. He seemed to be groping for the meaning of what had happened. The huge body swayed and the bowie clattered to the floor. Both brothers watched the killer intently. Neither fired a second shot, though every sense, nerve, and muscle waited in readiness for instant action.

Dutch clutched at the faro table with both hands, then unexpectedly pitched forward upon it, scattering chips and cards in all directions.

From behind the bar, from back of chairs and tables, men slowly emerged. Others gathered themselves from the floor where they had been lying low. The lookout stuck a head cautiously through the side doorway. There would be no more shooting.

Scot spoke quietly. "I take you all to witness, gentlemen, that he came here looking for trouble. My brother and I fired in self-defense."

Some one thrust a hand under the big body and pushed aside the blue coat. "Heart's still beating," he announced.

"Then send for a doctor and have him looked after. I'll pay the bill," Scot said, still in an even expressionless voice.

"Hadn't you better finish the job?" a voice whispered in Hugh's ear.

Hugh turned, dizzy with nausea. "God, no!" he answered.

"If he lives he'll get you sure—both of you."

"We're not murderers," the boy said. He groped his way to a chair and sat down quickly. Was he going to faint?

A hand fell on his shoulder. Through a haze Scot's voice came warm and low. "Good old Hugh. Saved my life sure. You were that cool—and game. Every move you made counted. If you hadn't deviled him till he lost his head, he'd likely have got one of us. Boy, I'm proud of you."

Hugh was ashamed of his weakness. "I didn't play the baby this a way when I got that Piute at the pass," he said apologetically.

"Nothing to it, boy. You came through fine. Except for you—well, I would have cashed in before now. Come. Let's get out of here."

The owner of the Crystal Palace was standing near.

"Can you get some one else to finish my shift?" Scot asked.

"Sure. I'll speak to Mowbray." The proprietor did a little legitimate grumbling. "There's sixty five saloons in this town, an' I'll be dog-goned if everybody doesn't come here to do their gun stuff. Seems like a man will walk clear up from Gold Hill so's to pull off his fireworks at the Crystal. It don't do business any good, lemme tell you."

"You're out of luck," his dealer smiled. "But we couldn't really help it this time."

"I don't say you could, Scot. I won't mourn for Sam Dutch, if you've got him. All I say is I try to run a quiet, respectable place, an' looks like I never get a chance."

The brothers walked out to the street. Patrons of the place fell back to let them pass and followed with their eyes the two straight, light-stepping men. Hugh was still a little stringy in build, but even in his immaturity it would have been hard to find a more promising-looking youngster. As for Scot, he was acknowledged to be the handsomest man in the diggings. No woman ever saw him pass without wanting to look at him twice.

The news had swept through town already, and as the brothers walked down the street a hundred men stopped to shake hands with and congratulate them. But even now they whispered their approval. It was possible Dutch might survive his wounds, in which case they were prepared to resume ostensible neutrality. The killer's name was one that sent the chills down the backs of even courageous men. He was more deadly than a rattlesnake, because he rarely gave warning before he struck.

CHAPTER VII.

VICKY TELLS SECRETS.

After what had just taken place at the Crystal Palace the bright sunshine of Nevada was welcome to both brothers. Inside the gambling house had been unwholesome excitement, passion, the dregs of cruel murder lust, and the shadow of death. In the open street were friendly faces, a sane world going about its business, and God's sun in the heavens. The McClintocks had probably snuffed out a life. It had been one horribly distorted by evil. None the less it shook their composure to have sent even such a soul to its last account. They wanted, if possible, to forget completely the look on the face of that huge figure collapsing upon the table.

A little girl stood squarely in front of them on the broken sidewalk. To the casual eye she appeared all patches, flying hair, and knobby legs. There was the shy wildness of a captured forest creature in her manner, but in her small body the McClintocks sensed, too, a dauntless spirit.

"Mister Goodmans," she said, addressing them both, "don't you 'member me?"

"Of course. You're Vicky," Scot told her.

She came directly to business. "Rob he's 'most always drunk, 'n' we ain't got nothin' to eat. Mollie 'n' me's jist awful hungry."

"Hungry? Good Lord!" cried Hugh.

His brother took charge of the situation. "Go in to Groton's with Vicky and get her a good dinner. I'll see what supplies I can pick up and go down to the wagon with them."

In front of the Delta saloon Scot met a Washoe Indian. He was carrying a half a sack of wild onions he had brought to town to trade. McClintock did business with him on the spot. At Lyman Jones' store the faro dealer bought some beans and coffee. He also induced the merchant to let him have the last five pounds of flour he had in stock. With these supplies he tramped to the edge of town to the place where the Dodsons had moved their camp.

He plowed through heavy sand, up a steep

slope of shale and loose rubble, to a narrow flat where the prairie schooner stood. Mollie Dodson must have heard him coming, for as he reached the wagon she called from within.

"Did you find Rob, Vicky?"

Perhaps the firmness of his tread told her at once of her mistake. She leaned out of the open flap and caught sight of Scot. Into her white face the color beat in waves. Startled eyes held to his with a surprised question in them.

"I—I was looking for Vicky," she said.

"Yes. I met Vicky." His white teeth flashed in a smile that sought to win her confidence. "That young lady has a lot of sense. She wanted to know why the trustees of the Virginia Dodson fund were not attending to business. So I'm here."

"Oh! Vicky oughtn't to have done that." Another surge of color, born of shame, swept into the cheeks.

For the first time Scot realized how very pretty she was. He found her diffidence charming, for he lived in a world where the women he knew could not afford to be shy.

"Vicky did just right," he protested while he was opening his sack. "Our baby must be well fed. It's my business to see to that, and I'm going to do it from now."

He built a fire while she watched him, the baby in her arms. Mollie was acutely uncomfortable. The gambler had taken off his coat in order that his movements might be freer. In his figured waistcoat, frilled cambric shirt, close-fitting trousers, and varnished boots he looked too exquisite for menial labor. She was acutely conscious of her patched and faded gingham. It was Cophetua and the beggar maid brought down to date, except that she was a wife and not a girl at all.

"I wish—you wouldn't," she stammered.

He stood up, masterful and dominant. His glance swept round and found a battered water bucket. "Where's the spring, Mrs. Dodson?" he asked.

"Let me go," she begged. "It's—it's quite a way."

"I'm feeling better to-day. Maybe I can make it to the spring and back," he said, smiling. "Which way please?"

Reluctantly she pointed to the spring. It was in an arroyo nearly a quarter of a mile distant.

"Robert forgot to get water before he left. He's—away looking for work," she explained with a slight tremor of the lips. He liked her better for the little lie. Scot guessed that Dodson had not been at the camp for several days. He had seen the man in town yesterday, very drunk, and again to-day, sleeping under an empty wagon in a vacant lot. It was a safe bet that Mollie Dodson carried the water for the family use.

Scot returned with the water and made a batch of biscuits and some hot coffee. While she ate he put beans on to boil. When he looked at her he saw tears in her brown eyes. She was choking over the food and trying to prevent him from seeing it. He decided that this was a time for plain talk.

"I reckon I can guess how you feel," he said gently. "But that's not the right angle to look at this thing. Back where you come from persons that take help from others are—well, they don't hold their heads up. But this is the West, a new country. The camp's short of food. It can't be bought in the market, unless you know the ropes. We share with each other here. In a kind of way we're all one big family. I'm your big brother, and I'm certainly going to see this baby is fed proper."

She murmured something he could not catch for the break in her voice. He bustled about the fire cheerfully and let her alone till she had regained control of herself. By which time Hugh and Vicky arrived, that long-legged young lady skipping volubly on the hilltops.

"Looky. Looky here, sister Mollie, what I got!" she cried in her eager, breathless fashion. "He got it for me, Mister—Mister Santa Claus." One finger pointed straight at Hugh, while she held out for the inspection of her sister a doll with blue eyes and flaxen hair.

"Oh, but you shouldn't—you ought not," Mollie protested to the boy. "Did she ask you for it?"

"No, ma'am. I wanted to get it for her. It's the only doll for sale in Virginia, far as I know. I been hankerin' to buy that doll. Now I feel a heap better."

Vicky herself was so clearly in a seventh heaven of delight that her sister had not the heart to say anything more about it. But she was uneasy in her mind. She wondered if their obligations to these young men would never end.

In the days that followed she had occasion many times to feel weighted by the kindnesses of Scot McClintock. Hugh had de-

parted to report for duty with the express company, but his brother made it a point to see that the little family in the prairie schooner did not suffer for food.

He hunted the cañons and brought back a young buck deer with him. One hind quarter of it went to Mollie Dodson to keep the pot boiling. Fish, rabbits, a prairie hen, three dozen eggs brought by a rancher all the way from Honey Lake Valley—these and other delicacies were forced upon the protesting woman.

Robert Dodson's attitude was one of sneering suspicion. He was willing that another man should supply his family with the food it needed, but he was small enough to jeer at his wife and bully her because of it. Even while he ate the meat brought by McClintock his tongue was a whip that lashed Mollie and the man. His whole attitude implied that the two were carrying on a clandestine love affair.

Mollie wept herself to sleep more nights than one. By nature a dependent woman, she did not now know which way to turn. Her husband was a broken reed. He no longer even pretended to be looking for work. Humiliating though it was, she had to accept Scot's favors. She could not let the family starve. A thousand times Robert Dodson had trampled her pride and affection in the dust. She knew that life with him held nothing for her, but it must go on through the long, gray years that stretched ahead till the end of things. She was not the sort of woman to contemplate suicide with any fortitude. Both the courage and the cowardice for it she lacked.

Scot returned from the Dodson camp one day, lips close set and eyes dangerously lit with a smoldering fire. Mollie was nursing a black eye. She had fallen, she told him, against the corner of the wagon. He had not believed her when she told her tremulous lie. But Vicky had settled the matter past doubt. She was waiting for him in a little gulch near the camp—waiting to tell him in a burst of impotent, childish passion that Dodson had beaten Mollie because she did not have supper ready for him when he came home hours after the fire was out.

As it chanced, McClintock met the ne'er-do-well a hundred yards farther down the gulch. Dodson was, for a wonder, sober. He had no money of his own, and he had been unable to wheedle many free drinks from miners.

At sight of the gambler Dodson scowled. He had plenty of reasons for disliking Scot. He nursed a continuous spleen because he would not let him get at the money collected for the baby. His pride suffered at accepting favors from a man who scorned him. He was jealous of the interest McClintock must have aroused in his chattel, Mollie Dodson. No matter how he stormed and sneered at her he could not keep her mind from a comparison of the men who just now were most present in her life, and in that silent judgment he knew he must play a sorry part.

The bummer, if one may use the phrase of the day, would have passed without speaking. A sulky dignity was the rôle he judged the most effective. But Scot caught him by the coat lapel and swung him sharply round.

"I'm going to teach you not to lay a hand on—on a woman," McClintock said, his voice thick with suppressed passion.

Dodson's thin mask of offended dignity fell away instantly. He tried to back off, snarling at the man whose steel grip held him.

"She's been tellin' lies on me, has she?" he retorted, showing his teeth.

"Mrs. Dodson says she fell against the wagon. I don't believe it. You struck her, you yellow wolf. Right now I'm going to give you the thrashing of your life."

The eyes of the loafer flashed fear. "You lemme go," he panted, trying to break away. "Don't you dass touch me. Think I don't know about you an' her? Think I'm a plumb idjit?"

An open-handed smash across the mouth stopped his words. He made a swift pass with his right hand. Scot's left shot out and caught the wrist, twisting it back and up. A bullet was flung into the sky; then, under the urge of a pain which leaped from wrist to shoulder of the tortured arm, the revolver dropped harmlessly to the ground.

"Goddlemighty, you're breakin' my arm," Dodson shrieked, sagging at the knees.

Scot sent home a stiff right. "You'll be nursing a black eye from that, to-morrow," he said evenly.

The craven in Dodson came out at once. He tried to escape punishment by whining and begging. He promised anything the other man might demand of him. He made an attempt to fling himself to the ground and cover up. McClintock set his teeth and went through with the job.

Afterward, to the bully who lay on the sand, sobbing with rage and pain, he gave curt orders. "You'll go back to town and not show up at the wagon to-night. To-morrow you'll tell Mrs. Dodson you had a fight. You'll not tell her who with or what it was about. If you ever lay a hand on her again or on Vicky, I'll break every bone in your body. Understand?"

The beaten man gulped out what might be taken for an assent.

Scot turned away, sick at heart. Already he questioned the wisdom of what he had done.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCOT OFFERS HEALTH HINTS.

A Washoe zephyr was playing impish tricks in Virginia City. It screamed down the side of Mount Davidson in a gale of laughter, filling the air with the white powder of alkali dust. It snatched hats from unwary heads and sent them flying into the cleft cañon below which led through the hills to the sage desert. It swooped up a dog on A Street and dropped the yelping cur down the chimney of a shack on B Street. Boards were ripped from fences and sucked straight into the air for fifty feet. A basket of duck eggs took premature flight from a farmer's wagon, sailed through the window of a barber shop, and give a customer in the chair a free egg shampoo. The wind came in ribald gusts, tremendous, filled with jeering howls.

About Virginia City there have been many disputes, but nobody who lived there in the sixties ever denied that it was the windiest spot on earth. The town slanted like a steep roof, each street a terrace. During the zephyrs, all sorts of possessions came rolling downhill like tumbleweeds. They ranged in size from a spool of thread to the roof of a house.

Scot McClintock, working his way along B Street, took refuge in a hurdy-gurdy* near Union. The noise of a piano, of fiddles, of stamping feet, filled the hall. The place was flooded with light from kerosene lamps set in candelabras with crystal pendants. At one side of the room was the inevitable bar.

A blond young woman of Teutonic descent joined Scot. "Would you like to dance, Mr. McClintock?" she asked deferentially.

"Not to-night, thank you," he answered with the grave respect he gave all women.

His glance swept the hall and was arrested by a small group near the farther end of the bar. The central figure of it was a huge, rough-bearded man with long hair flowing to his shoulders. He wore an army overcoat, dusty boots, and Mexican spurs.

The girl's eyes gave a signal of alarm. She had forgotten for the moment about the affair between the McClintocks and Sam Dutch.

"First time he's been down," she whispered. "He has not yet seen you already. If you like—the door——"

Scot smiled grimly. He had a picture of himself slipping out of the door to avoid Sam Dutch. It was his temperament always to take the bull by the horns. He stepped across the dance floor to the bar. The desperado, clinking glasses with a girl, looked round to see his enemy before him. He was taken at a disadvantage. Was this a trap set for him? If he made a move, would the younger McClintock or some other ally of the gambler fill him full of slugs? Nervously his eyes stole round the big room. They came back to the clean, straight figure standing in front of him.

"No place for you, Dutch," the faro dealer said curtly. "Not good for your health. You've got a weak heart, you know. It's likely to stop working altogether if you're not careful of yourself. Go home—now—right away—and stay there till the stage leaves. This is an unhealthy altitude for you. Try Aurora or Dayton."

The bad man moistened his dry lips with his tongue. Tiny beads of moisture stood out on his forehead. He had come to the parting of the ways and knew it. If he let this man drive him from the house he could never hold up his head in Virginia again. His reign as chief would be ended here. Should he take a chance and draw? He had killed many men. This gambler, so far as he knew, had never got one. Why not now? This very instant. It would all be over in a flash.

*An unusual feature of Virginia City was the hurdy house. In the early days it was quite respectable, at least from the Western point of view. The girls were generally Germans. Their business was to dance with the miners, and to lead them afterward to the bar for a drink. Most of the girls saved their money to send home to their parents overseas. Serious-minded young women, they often married well and happily. Later, these houses degenerated. W. M. R.

And yet—he could not do it. With McClintock's cold and steely stare on his, he could not drop the glass from his hand and reach for a revolver. The wills of the two clashed, fought out the battle, and the stronger won. The gaze of the killer fell away and slid round the hall in a furtive search for help.

It found none. He was playing a lone hand. The way out must be one of his own choosing. Of all these men and women who watched this crisis so tensely not one but would be glad to see him blotted out of existence. His hand was against every man's. That was the penalty he paid for his reputation.

Again his tongue went out to moisten dry lips. "I—I reckon you're right," he heard himself say huskily. "I ain't feelin' good yet. Fact is, I'm still a sick man. Mebbe I better go home. I was thinkin' that a way myself before you came in."

"Keep right on thinking it. Think yourself out of Virginia inside of twenty-four hours," ordered Scot implacably.

Dutch drained the glass and put it down shakily on the bar. He laughed with attempted bravado and swaggered to the door.

"Meet up with you again, one o' these days, Mr. McClintock," he said, his voice and manner a threat.

Scot said nothing. Not for an instant did his unwavering eyes release the man till the door had shut behind him. Then, quickly, disregarding the hands of congratulation thrust at him, he pushed through the crowd and passed from the rear of the building. He had no intention of letting himself be a target for a shot through the window.

The discredited killer did not leave by the stage. He went out by private buckboard to Carson, from whence he drifted to the new camp Aurora, already the largest town in that part of Nevada. His self-esteem, shaken by the show-down in the hurdy-gurdy house, was shortly restored by a rencontre with another bad man. He shot his victim in the stomach while they were drinking together, after which he was cock of the walk at Aurora.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A REMOTE POSSIBILITY

COLONEL FRANKLIN PIERCE MORGAN, the silver-haired veteran of a thousand political campaigns, skirmishes and battles, is a Democrat whose party fealty is so ardent that during every presidential contest he considers that a Republican, who expects victory is, to all intents and purposes, demented. Last September, when the Republicans apparently were ahead in the running, one of that faith bantered the jaunty and optimistic colonel with the taunt:

"Crowing, are you, you old rooster? You'd better be crying! If you knew what we're going to do to you next November, you'd be howling."

"You're off—'way off," replied Morgan. "I've just about as much ground for tears as a certain little girl playmate of mine once had.

"A third-rate scientist was delivering a lecture one Friday afternoon to all the school children, his highly uninstructive and boring subject being Niagara Falls. After a while, he came out with the statement that the immense body of water had tremendous erosive power. He declared that, in three hundred thousand more years, the falls would wear their way back as far as Erie, thereby ruining that city.

When he said that, the little girl sitting next to me began to boo-hoo as if her heart would break.

"'Why, what's the matter?' inquired the lecturer.

"'Oh, sir!' wept the little girl. 'I've got a sister living in Erie!'"

The Light That Lied

By B. M. Bower

Author of "You Ask Anybody," "Thanking You In Advance," Etc.

"Casey" Ryan always did have a hankering for prospecting, and he especially pined to locate that fabulous mine of old Injun Jim's. As usual with Casey, once started, he discovers a good deal besides what he's looking for.

(A Two-Part Story—Part I.)

LOOK there!" Casey rose from the ground where he had been sitting with his hands clasped round his drawn-up knees. He pointed with his pipe to a mountainside twelve miles away but looking five, even in the gloom of early dark. "Look at that, will yuh! Whadda yuh say that is, just makin' a guess? A fire, mebby?"

"Camp fire. Some prospector boiling coffee in a dirty lard bucket, perhaps."

Casey snorted. "It's a darn big fire to boil a pot uh coffee! Recollect, it's twelve mile over to that mountain. A bonfire a mile off wouldn't look any bigger than that. Would it, now?" His tone was a challenge to my truthfulness.

"Wel-l, I guess it wouldn't, come to think of it."

"Guess? You know darn well it wouldn't. You watch that there fire. I ain't over there—but if that ain't the devil's lantern I'll walk on my hands from here over there an' find out for yuh."

"I'd have to go over there myself to find out whether you're right or wrong. But if a fellow can trust his eyes, Casey——"

"Well, you can't," Casey said grimly, still standing, his eyes fixed upon the distant light. "Not here in this country, you can't. You ask anybody. You don't trust yore eyes when yuh come to a dry lake an' you see water, an' the bushes around the shore reflected in the water, an' mebby a boat out in the middle. *Do* yuh? You don't trust yore eyes when you look at them hills. They look close enough to walk over to 'em in half or three-quarters of an hour. *Don't they?* An' didn't I take yuh in my Ford auty*mo*bil, an' wasn't it twelve? An' d'yuh trust yore eyes when yuh look up, an' it looks like you could knock a star down with a tent pole, like yuh knock apples offn trees?

"Sure, you can't trust yore eyes! When yuh hit the desert, ole-timer, yuh pack two of the biggest liars on earth right under yore eyebrows." He chuckled at that. "An' most folks pack another one under their noses, fer luck. Now, lookit over there! Prospector nothin'. It's the devil out walkin' an' packin' a lantern. He's mebby found some shin bones an' a rib er two an' mebby a chewed boot, an' he's stopped there to have his little laugh. Lemme tell yuh. You mark where that fire is. An' t'morra, if yuh like, I'll take yuh over there. If you c'n find a track er embers on that slope—— Gawsh!"

We both stood staring; while he talked, the light had blinked out like snapping an electric switch. And that was strange, because camp fires take a little time in the dying. I stepped inside the tent, fumbled for the field glasses and went out adjusting the night focus. Casey's squat, powerful form stood perfectly still where I had left him, his face turned toward the mountain. There was no fire on the slope.

Beyond, hanging black in the sky, a thunder cloud pillowed up toward the peak of the mountain, rolling out now and then to blot a star from the purple. Now and then a white, ragged gash cut through, but there was no sound that reached up to where we were camped on the high mesa that was the lap of Ghost Mountain. I will explain that Casey had found and sold a very good silver

claim at Ghost, and had come back to see if there were not another one lying loose and needing a location monument. We faced Tippepah Ridge twelve miles away—and, to-night, the fire on its slope.

"Lightning struck a yucca over there and burned it, probably," I hazarded, seeking the spot through the glasses.

"Yeah—only there ain't no yuccas on that slope. That's a limestone ledge formation an' there ain't enough soil to cover up a t'rantler. An' the storm's over back of the Tippepahs. It ain't on 'em."

"It's burning up again——"

"Hit another yucca, mebby!"

"It looks"—I adjusted the lenses carefully—"like a fire, all right. There's a reddish cast. I can't see any flames, exactly, but——" I suppose I gave a gasp, for Casey laughed outright.

"No, I guess yuh can't. Flames don't travel like that—huh?"

The light had moved suddenly, so that it seemed to jump clean away from the field of vision embraced by the glasses. I had a little trouble in picking it up again. I had to take down the glasses and look; and then I left them down and watched the light with my naked, lying eyes. They did lie; they must have. They said that a camp fire had abruptly picked itself up bodily and was slipping rapidly as a speeding automobile up a bare white slide of rock so steep that a mountain goat would give one glance and hunt out an easier trail. All my life I have had intimate acquaintance with camp fires; I have eaten with them, slept with them, coaxed them in storm, watched them from afar. I thought I knew all their tricks, all their treacheries. I have seen apparently cold ashes blow red quite unexpectedly and fire grass and bushes, and go racing away—I have fought them then, with whatever came to hand.

I admit that an odd, prickly sensation at the base of my scalp annoyed me while I watched this fire race up the slope and leave no red trail behind it. Then it disappeared—blinked out again. I opened my mouth to call Casey's attention to it—though I felt that he was watching it with that steady, squinting stare of his that never seems to wink or waver for a second. But there it was again, come to a stop just under the crest of the mountain where the white slide was topped by a black rim capped with bleak, bare rock like a crude skullcap on Tippepah. The fire flared bright, dimmed, burned bright again, as though some one had piled on dry brush. I caught up the glasses and watched the light for a full minute. They were good glasses—I ought to have seen the flicker of flames; but I did not. Just the reddish-yellow glare and no more.

"Must be fox fire," I said, feeling impatient because that did not satisfy at all, but having no other explanation handy. "I've seen wonderful exhibitions of it in low, swampy ground."

Casey spat into the dark. "I never heard of nobody boggin' down up there on Tippepah." He put his cold pipe in his mouth, removed it, and gestured with it toward the light. "I've saw jack o' lanterns myself. You know darn well that ain't it; not up on them rocks, dry as a bone. A minute ago you said it was lightnin' burnin' a yucca. Why don't yuh come out in the open, an' say you don't *know?*

"Mebby you'll come closer to believin' what I told yuh about that devil's lantern I follered. He's lit another one—kinda hopin' we'll be fool enough to fall for it. You come inside, where yuh can't watch it. That's what does the damage—watchin' and wonderin' and then goin' to see. I bet you wanta strike out right now and see just what it is. Don't yuh?"

I didn't admit it, but Casey had guessed exactly what was in my mind. I was itching with curiosity and trying to ignore the creepiness of it. Casey went into the tent and lighted the candle and proceeded to unlace his high hiking boots. "You come on in and go to bed. Don't yuh pay no attention to that light—that's what the Old Boy plays for first, every time; workin' your curiosity up. You ask anybody. He played me for a sucker and let me in for more trouble than you'd think was runnin' loose in the hull country.

"I told yuh about that, and yuh thought Casey was stringin' yuh. Well, I can take a joke from the devil himself and never let out a yip—but once is enough for Casey! I'm goin' to bed. Let him set out there and hold his lantern and be darned; he ain't going to make nothin' offn Casey Ryan *this* time. You can ask anybody if Casey bites twice on the same hook."

He got into bed and turned his face to the wall with a finality I could not ignore. I let it go at that, but twice I got up and

went outside to look. There burned the light, diabolically like a signal fire on the peak, where no fire should be. I began to seek explanations, but the best of them were vague. Electricity playing a prank of some obscure kind—that was as close as I could get to it, and even that did not satisfy as it should have done; perhaps because the high, barren mesas and the mountains of bare rock are in themselves weird and sinister.

The land is so empty of men, emptier still of habitations. There are not many animals, even. A few coyotes, all of them under suspicion of having rabies; venomous things such as tarantulas and centipedes, scorpions, rattlers, hydrophobia skunks—but not so many of them that they are a constant menace; you know that the barren land harbors them all. Great, sprawling dry lakes ominous in their very placidity; bone dry, with little whirlwinds scurrying over them and mirages that lie to you most convincingly, painting water where there is only clay dust. Water that is hidden deep in forbidding cañons, water that you must hunt for blindly, unless you have been told where it comes stealthily out from some crevice in the rocks. Indians know the water holes, and have told the white men with whom they made friends after a fashion—for Casey tells me he never knew a red man who was essentially noble—and these men have told others, and they have named the springs and have indicated their location on maps. Otherwise the land is dry, parched and deadly and beautiful, and men have died terrible, picturesque deaths within its borders.

I was thinking of that, and it seemed not too incongruous that the devil should now and then walk abroad with a lantern of his own devising to make men shrink from his path. But Casey says, and I think he means it, that the light is a lure. He told me a weird adventure of his own to back his argument. I thought he was inventing most of it as he went along, but certain things he told me I have since learned were true enough—making allowance for a different viewpoint, and for hearsay and gossip.

If you don't believe him I shall not blame you; but Casey swears that it is all true, except that he, perhaps, did not paint vividly enough his experience with the squaws. He says nobody could. However, the squaws come later in Casey's little drama. It's worth beginning where Casey did, at the beginning. And that goes back to when he was driving stage in the Yellowstone.

Casey was making the trip out, one time, and he had just one passenger because it was at the end of the season and there had been a week of nasty weather that had driven out most of the sightseers and no new ones were coming in. This man was a peevish sort, I imagine. At any rate, he did a lot of talking about himself and his ill luck, and told Casey of his misfortunes by the hour.

Casey did not mind that much. He says he didn't listen half the time. But finally the fellow began talking of the wealth that is wasted on folks who can't use it properly or even appreciate their good fortune.

To illustrate that point he told a story that set Casey's mind to seeing visions. The man told about an old Indian who lived in dirt and a government blanket and drank bad whisky when he could get it, and whipped his squaw and behaved exactly like other Indians. Yet that old Indian knew where gold lay so thick that he could pick out pieces of crumbly rock all peppered with free gold. He was too lazy to dig out enough to do him any good. He would come into the nearest town with a rusty old lard bucket full of high grade so rich that the storekeeper once got five hundred dollars from the bucketful. He gave the Indian about twenty dollars' worth of grub and made him a present of two yards of bright blue ribbon, which tickled the old buck so much that in two weeks he was back with more high grade knotted in the bottom of a gunny sack.

Casey asked the man why some one didn't trail him. Casey knew, without being reminded of it, that an Indian is not permitted to file a claim to mineral. He could not hold it, under the law, if some white man discovered it and located the ground. But Casey thought that some white-hearted fellow might take the claim and pay the buck a certain percentage of the profits.

The man said that couldn't be done. The old buck—Injun Jim, they called him—was an old she-bear. All the Indians were afraid of him, and would hide their faces in their blankets when he passed them on his way to the gold, rather than be suspected by Injun Jim of any unwarranted interest in his destination. Casey knew enough about Indians to accept that statement. And white men, it would seem, were either not nervy

enough or else they were not cunning enough. A few had attempted to trail Injun Jim, but no one seemed to have succeeded, because that part of Nevada had not had any gold stampede, which the man declared would have come sure as fate if Injun Jim's mine were ever uncovered.

Casey asked certain questions and learned all that the man could tell him—or would tell him. He said that Injun Jim lived mostly in the Tippepah district. No free gold had ever been discovered there, nor much gold of any kind; but Injun Jim certainly brought free gold into Round Butte whenever he wanted grub. It must have been ungodly rich—five hundred dollars' worth in a ten-pound lard bucket!

The tale held Casey's imagination. He dreamed nights of trailing Injun Jim, and if he'd had the money to outfit for the venture, he surely would have gone straight to Nevada and to Round Butte. He told himself that it would take an outsider to furnish the energy for the search. Men who live in a country are the last to see the possibilities lying all around them, Casey said. It was true—he had seen it work out even in himself. Hadn't he driven stage in Cripple Creek country and carried out gold by the hundred thousand—gold that might have been his had he not been content to drive stage? Hadn't he lived in gold country all his life, almost, and didn't he know mineral formations as well as many a school-trained expert?

But even dreams of gold fluctuate and grow vague before the small interests of everyday living. Casey hadn't the money, just then, to quit his job of stage driving and go Indian stalking. It would take money—a few hundred at least. Casey at that time lacked the price of a ticket to Round Butte. So he had to drive and dream, and his first spurt of saving grew half-hearted as the weeks wore on. Then he lost all he had saved in a poker game, because he wanted to win enough to make the trip.

Well, a few years went like that. One job and then another, and the money gone somehow. He drove a stage of his own from Pinnacle to Lund for a while, pulled out of it with a Ford and a load of supplies, and came to Ghost Mountain prospecting. He felt that he was working gradually toward his point, you see. He went among men with his ears open for gossip concerning Injun Jim, and he gleaned bits of information that seemed to confirm what his passenger up in the Yellowstone had told him. He even met a man who knew Injun Jim.

Injun Jim, he was told, had one eye and a bad temper. He had lost his right eye in a fight with soldiers, in the days when Indian fighting was part of a soldier's training. Injun Jim nursed a grudge, and while he behaved himself nowadays, being old and not very popular among his own people, it was taken for granted that his trigger finger would never be paralyzed, and that a white man need only furnish him a thin excuse and a fair chance to cover all traces of the killing. Injun Jim would attend to the rest with great zeal.

Stranger still, Casey found that the tale of the lard bucket and the gold was true. This man had once been in the store when Jim arrived for grub. He had taken a piece of the ore in his hands. It was free gold, all right, and it must have come from a district where free gold was scarce as women.

"We've got it figured down to a spot about fifty miles square," the man told Casey. "That old Injun don't travel long trails. He's old. And all Injuns are lazy. They won't go hunting mineral like a white man. They know mineral when they see it, and they have very good memories and can go to the spot afterward. Injun Jim prob'ly run across a pocket somewheres when he was hunting. Can't be much of it—he'd bring in more at a time if there was, and be Injun rich. He's just figurin' on making it hold out long as he lives. 'Tain't worth while trying to find it; there's too much mineral laying around loose in these hills."

Casey stored all that away in the back of his head and went on to Ghost Mountain to find some of the mineral that was lying around loose. He sold the claim he located —sold for twenty-five thousand cash, which ought to have given him a start toward financial independence. As it happened, the check merely started him toward Los Angeles—and he lost every cent before he could board a train. Poker and Casey never could understand each other.

Then Bill Masters, a friend in need at Lund where he kissed his small fortune goodby, persuaded Casey to take charge of a garage on the highway at Patmos. Casey wanted to get right at the Injun Jim Mine, but Bill was neither a gambler at poker

nor at prospecting, and he fought the idea. He knew there was money in a garage, and he talked Casey over.

Casey earned a good deal of money, but there are men who are very good at finding original ways of losing money, too. Casey is one. That summer was enough for him, and more than enough. You should hear Casey unburden himself some time upon the subject of garages and the tourist trade! He resigned from the garage at Patmos with money enough to buy two burros and a mule, and what grub and tools the burros could carry. There were no poker games in Patmos, and a discouraged prospector happened along at the right moment, which accounts for it.

In this speed-hungry age Casey had not escaped the warped viewpoint which others assume toward travel. Casey always had craved the sensation of swift moving through space. His old stage horses could tell you tales of that! It was a distinct comedown, buying burros for his venture. That took straight, native optimism and the courage to make the best of things. But he hadn't the price of a Ford, and Casey abhors debt; so he remarked cheerfully that many a millionaire would still be poor if he had turned up his nose at burros, sour-dough cans, and the business end of pick and shovel.

At that, he was better off than most prospectors, he told himself on the night of his purchase. He had the mule, William, to ride. The prospector had assured Casey over and over that William was saddle broke. Casey is too happy-go-lucky, I think. He took the man's word for it and waited until the night before he intended beginning his journey before he gave William a tryout, down in a sandy hollow back of the garage. He returned after dark leading William. Casey had a pronounced limp, an eyetooth was broken short off about halfway to the gums, and his lip was cut.

"William's saddle broke, all right," he told his neighbor, the proprietor of the Oasis. "I've saw horses broke like that; cowpunchers have fun in the c'rall with 'em Sundays, seein' which one can stay with the saddle three jumps. William don't mind the saddle atall. All he hates is anybody in it." Then he grinned wryly because of his hurt. "No use arguin' with a mule—I used to be too good a walker."

Casey therefore traded his riding saddle for another packsaddle, and collected six coal-oil cans which he cleaned carefully. William was loaded with cans of water, which he seemed to prefer to Casey, though they probably weighed more. The burros waddled off under their loads of beans, flour, bacon, coffee, lard—and a full set of prospector's tools. Casey set his course by the stars and fared forth across the desert, meaning to pass through the lower end of Death Valley by night, on a trail he knew, and so plod up toward the Round Butte country.

He was happy. He owed no man a nickel, he had grub enough to last him three months if he were careful; he had a body tough as seasoned hickory, and he was headed for that great no man's land which is the desert. More, he was actually upon the trail of his dream that he had dreamed years before up in the Yellowstone. An old, secretive Indian was going to find his match when Casey Ryan plodded over his horizon and halted beside his fire.

By the way, don't blame me for showing a fondness for gloom and gore when you read the names Casey lived with in the next few months. The desert is full of deadly, sinister things. It is a place of malevolent beauty, and it will smile and torture a man to the last breath in his withered frame. Casey crossed Death Valley and the Funeral Mountains—or a spur of them—and headed up toward Spectre Range, going by way of Deadman's Spring where he filled his water cans. That does not sound cheerful, but Casey was still fairly happy—though there were moments when he thought seriously of killing William with a rock.

Every morning, without fail, he and William fought every minute from breakfast to starting time. From his actions you would think that William had never seen a pack before, and expected it to bite him fatally if he came within twenty feet of it. You could tell Casey's camps by the manner in which the sagebrush was trampled and the sand scored with small hoofprints in a wide circle around it. But once William had lost for that day, and Casey had rested and mopped the perspiration off his face and taken a comforting chew of tobacco and relapsed into silence simply because he could think of nothing more to say, William became a pet dog that hazed the two lazy burros along with little nippings on their rumps, and saw to it that they did not stray too far from camp.

Casey swung into Searchlight one evening

at dusk and camped on a little knoll behind the town hall, where there was open ground beyond for grazing and the village dogs were less likely to bother. Searchlight was not on his way, but miles off to one side. Casey made the detour because he had heard a good deal about the place and knew it as a favorite stamping ground of miners and prospectors who sought free gold. Searchlight is primarily a gold camp, you see. He wanted to hear a little more about Injun Jim.

But there had been a murder in Searchlight a dark night or so before his coming and three suspects were being discussed and championed by their friends. Searchlight was not in the mood for aimless gossip of Indians. Killings had been monotonously frequent, but they usually had daylight and an audience to rob them of mystery. A murder done on a dark night, in the black shadow of an empty dance hall, and a piercing scream and the sound of running feet, was vastly different. Casey lingered half a day, bought a few more pounds of bacon and some matches, and ten yards of satin ribbon in assorted colors and went his way.

I mention his stop at Searchlight so that those who demand exact geography will understand why Casey journeyed on to Las Vegas, tramped its hot sidewalks for half a day, and then went on by way of Indian Spring to the Tippepah country and his destination. He was following the beaten trail of miners, now that he was in Injun Jim's country, and he was gleaning a little information from every man he met. Not altogether concerning Injun Jim, understand—but local titbits that might make him a welcome companion to the old buck when he met him. Casey says you are not to believe story writers who assume that an Indian is wrapped always in a blanket and inscrutable dignity. He says an Indian is as great a gossip as any old woman, once you get him thawed to the talking point. So he was filling his bag of tricks, you see, as he went along.

From Las Vegas there is what purports to be an automobile road across the desert to Round Butte, and Casey, as he walked, cursed his burros and William and sighed for his Ford. He was four days traveling to Furnace Lake, which he had made in a matter of hours with his Ford when he first came to Ghost.

He struck Furnace Lake just before dusk and pushed the burros out upon it, thinking he would have cool crossing and would start in the morning with the lake behind him, which would be something of a load off his mind. In his heart Casey hated Furnace Lake, and he had good reason. It was a place of ill fortune for him, especially after the sun had left it. He wanted it behind him where he need think no more about it and the gruesome crevice that cut a deep, wide gash two-thirds of the way across it through the middle. Casey is not a coward, and he takes most things as matter of fact, but he admits that he has always hated and distrusted Furnace Lake beyond all the dry lakes in Nevada—and there are many.

He yelled to William, and William nipped the nearest burro into a shambling half trot, and they went out upon the lake, Casey heading straight across at the widest part so that he would strike his old trail to Ghost Mountain on the other side. From there to the summit he could make by noon on the morrow, he planned. Which would be the end of the preliminary journey and the beginning of Casey's last drive toward his goal; for from the top of the divide between Ghost Mountain country and that forbidding waste which lies under the calm scrutiny of Furnace Peak he could see the far-off ridge of the Tippepahs.

He was a mile out on the lake when he first glimpsed the light. Casey studied it while he walked behind William, leaving no footprints on the hard-baked clay. He had not known that any road followed just under the crest of the ridge that hid Crazy Woman Lake, yet the light was plainly that of an automobile moving with speed across the face of the ridge just under the summit.

When you are away out in the Empty Land you notice little things and think about them and try to understand just what they mean, unless they are things with which you are perfectly familiar. One print of a foot on the trail may betray the lurking presence of a madman, a murderer, a traveling friendly desert dweller or the wandering of some one who is lost and dying of thirst and hunger. You have to know which, and you are not satisfied until you do know.

A light moving swiftly along Crazy Woman Ridge meant a car, and a car up there meant a road. If there were a road it would probably lead Casey by a shorter route to the Tippepahs. He circled William and the burros—William at a placatory dis-

tance—and turned them at a right angle to his intended crossing. They followed him docilely, but William lifted his head and brayed tremulously three times in the dark. Casey had never heard him bray before, and the sudden rasping outcry startled him.

He went back and stood for a minute looking at William, who turned tail and started back toward the shore they had left behind them. Casey ran to head him off, yelling threats, and William, in spite of his six water cans—two of them empty, however—broke into a lope. Casey glanced over his shoulder as he ran and saw dimly that the burros had turned and were coming after him, their ears flapping loosely on their bobbing heads as they trotted. Beyond him, the light still traveled toward the Tippepahs.

Then, with an abruptness that cannot be pictured, everything was blotted out in a swirl of dust as the wind came whooping at them. It threw Casey as though some one had tripped him. It spun him round and round on his back like an overturned beetle, and then scooted him across the surface flat as a floor. He thought of the crevice, but there was nothing he could do save hold his head off the ground and his two palms over the face, shielding his nostrils a little from the smother of dust.

Sometimes he was lifted inches from the surface and borne with incredible swiftness. More than once he was spun round and round until his senses reeled. But all the while he was going somewhere, and I suspect that for once in his life Casey Ryan went fast enough to satisfy him. He felt brush sweep past his body, and he knew that he must have been carried to the edge of the lake. He clutched, scratched his hands bloody on the straggly thorns of greasewood, caught in the dark at a more friendly sage and gripped it next the roots. The wind tore at him, howling. Casey flattened his abused body to the sand and hung on.

Two hours later by the pale stars that peered out breathlessly when the fury of the gale was gone, Casey pulled himself painfully to his feet and looked for the burros and William. Judging by his own experience, they had had a rough time of it and would not go far after the wind permitted them to stop. But as to guessing how far they had been impelled, or in what direction, Casey knew that was impossible. Still, he tried.

When the air grew clearer and the surrounding hills bulked like huge shadows against the sky, he saw that he had been blown toward the ridge that guards Crazy Woman Lake. His pack animals should be somewhere ahead of him, he thought groggily, and began stumbling along through the brush-covered sand dunes that bordered Furnace Lake for miles.

And then he saw again the light, shining up there just under the crest of the ridge. He was glad the car had escaped, but he reflected that the tricky winds of the desert seldom sweep a large area. Their diabolic fury implies a concentration of force that would of necessity weaken as it flowed out away from the center. Up there on the ridge they may not have experienced more than a steady blow.

He walked slowly because of his bruises, and many times he made small detours thinking that a blotch of shadow off to one side might he his pack train. Each time a greasewood mocked him, waving stiff arms at him derisively. In the sage land distances deceive. A man may walk unseen before your eyes, and a bush may trick you with its semblance to man or beast. Casey finally gave up the hopeless search and headed straight for the light.

It stood still now—a car facing him with its headlights burning, the distance so great that the two lights glowed as one. "An' it ain't no Ford," Casey decided. "They wouldn't keep the engine runnin' all this time, standin' still. Unless it's one of them old kind with lamps."

I don't suppose you realize, many of you, just what that would mean to a man in the desert country. It is rather hard to define, but the significance would be felt, even by Casey in his present plight. You see, small cars, of the make too famous to be hurt or helped by having its name mentioned in a simple yarn like this, have long been recognized as the proper car for rough trails and no trails. Those who travel the desert most have come to the point of counting lizzie almost as necessary as beans.

Wherefore a larger car is nearly always brought in by strangers to the country, who swear solemnly never to repeat the imprudence. A large car, driven by strangers in the land, means hunters, prospectors from the outside brought in by some special tale of hidden wealth—or just plain simpletons who only want to see what lies over the

mountain. There aren't many of the last-named variety up in the Nevada wastes. Even your nature-loving rovers oddly keep pretty much to the beaten trails of other nature lovers. The Painted Desert, the Petrified Forest, the National Old Trails—but not the high, wind-swept mesas of Nevada's barren land.

A fear that was not altogether strange to him crept over Casey. It would be just his grinning enemy ill luck on his trail again, if that light should prove to be made by men hunting for Injun Jim and his mine. Casey used to feel a sickness in his middle when that thought nagged at him, and he felt a weak anger now, when he looked at the twinkling glow. He walked a little faster, forgetting his lost animals for a time. Now that the fear had come to him, Casey knew that he must come up with the men, talk with them, learn their business, if they were truthful, or sense their lying if they tried to hide their purpose from him. He must know. If they were seeking Injun Jim, then he must find some way to head them off, circumvent their plans with strategy of his own. He had dreamed too long and too ardently to submit now to interlopers.

So he walked, limping and cursing a little, now and then, because of his aches. Up a steep slope made heavy with loose sand that dragged at his feet; over the crest and down the other side among rocks and gravel that made harder walking than the sand. Up another steep slope—it was heartbreaking, but Casey kept on. He was not worried over his own plight; not yet. His burros were somewhere ahead of him, since they could not cling to a bush and so resist the impetus of that terrific wind. There was a car standing on the ridge toward which he was laboriously making his way. It did not occur to Casey that morning might show him a rather desperate plight.

Yet the morning did just that. Hours before dawn the light had disappeared abruptly, but Casey had no uneasiness over that. It was foolish for them to run down their battery burning lights when they were standing still. They had not moved off, and he had well in mind the contour of the ridge where they were standing. He would have bet good money that he could walk straight to the car even though darkness hid it from him until he came within hailing distance.

But daylight found him still below the higher slope of the ridge, and Casey was very tired. He had been walking all day, remember, and he had missed his supper because he wanted to eat it with the lake behind him. He did not walk in a straight line. He was too near exhaustion to forge ahead as was his custom. Now he was picking his way carefully so as to shun the washes out of which he must climb, and rock patches where he might stumble, and thick brush that would claw at him. He would have given five dollars for a drink of water, but there would be water at the car, he told himself. People were rather particular about carrying plenty of water when they traveled these wastes.

And then he was on the ridge, and his keen, bright eyes were squinted half shut while he gazed here and there, no foot of exposed land surface escaping that unwinking stare. He took off his hat and wiped his face, and reached mechanically for a chew of tobacco which he always took when perplexed, as if it stimulated thought.

There was no car. There was no road. There was not even a burro trail along that ridge. Yet there had been the lights of a car, and after the lights had been extinguished Casey had listened rather anxiously for sound of the motor and had heard nothing at all. The most powerful, silent-running car on the market would have made some noise in traveling through that sand and up and down the washes that seamed the mountainside. Casey would have heard it—he has remarkably keen hearing.

"And that's darn funny," he muttered when he was perfectly sure that there was no car, that there couldn't have been a car on that ridge. "That's mighty damn queer. You can ask anybody."

Other things were not so funny to Casey as he stood staring down over the vast emptiness. There was no sign of his pack train, and without it he would be in sorry case indeed. He thought of the manner in which the tornado had whirled him round and round; caught in a different set of gyrations, and then born out from the center—flung out would come nearer it—the burros and William might have been carried in any direction save his own. Into that gruesome crevice, for instance. It had not been more than a mile away when the storm struck.

He glanced across to Furnace Peak rising steeply from the farther end of the lake. There was a mine up there near the top, but

he did not think of going there except to tell himself that he'd rot on the desert before he ever asked there for help. He had his reasons, of course; they had to do with a woman—almost, of course. A man like Casey can face humiliation from men much easier than he can face a woman who has misjudged him and scorned him. Unless, of course, he has a million dollars in his pocket and knows that she knows it.

Having discarded Furnace Peak from his plans—rather, having declined to consider Furnace Peak at all, he knew that he must find his supplies, or he must find water somewhere in the Crazy Woman hills. The prospect was not bright, for he had never heard of any one watering there.

He waited where he was for a while to rest and watched the slope for the pack animals; more particularly for William and the water cans. He could shoot rabbits and live for days, if he had a little water, but he had once tried living on rabbit meat broiled without salt, and he called it dry eating, even with water to wash it down. Without water he would as soon let the rabbits live.

A dark speck moving in the sage, far down the slope, caught his eyes, and he got up and peered that way eagerly. He started down to meet it hopefully, feeling certain that his present plight would soon merge into a mere incident of the trail. Sure enough, when he had walked for half an hour he saw that it was William browsing toward him and limping when he moved.

But William was bare as the back of Casey's hand. There was no pack, no coal-oil cans of water—only the halter and lead rope, that dangled and caught on brush and impeded William's halting progress. I suppose even miserable mules like company, for William permitted Casey to walk up and take him by the halter rope. William had a badly skinned knee, which gave him the limp, and his right ear was broken close to his head so that the structure which had been his pride drooped over his eye like a wet sunbonnet.

Casey swore a little and started back along William's tracks to find the water cans. He followed a winding, purposeless trail that never showed the track of burros, and after an hour or so he came upon the pack and the cans. Evidently the water supply had suffered in the wind, for only four cans were with the blankets and packsaddle.

William had felt his pack slipping, Casey surmised, and had proceeded to divest himself of the incumbrance in the manner best known to mules. Having kicked himself out of it, he had undoubtedly discovered a leaking can—supposing the cans had escaped thus far—and had battered them with his heels until they were leaking copiously.

Casey read the story there in the sage. The four cans were bent with gaping seams, and their sides were scored with the prints of William's hoofs. In a corner of one of them Casey found a scant half cup of water, which he drank greedily. It could no more than ease his parched feeling; it could not satisfy his thirst.

After that he led William back along the trail until the mounting sun warned him that he was making no headway on his journey to the Tippepahs, and that with no tracks in sight he had small hope of tracing the burros.

It was sundown again before he gave up hope, and, although he had shot and broiled a rabbit, Casey's thirst was a demon within him, burning and taunting and whispering crazy thoughts which Casey pushed from him impatiently. He had wasted a day, he told himself grimly. Now it was going to be a fight.

Through the day he had mechanically studied the geologic formation of those hills before him, and he had decided that the chance for water there was too slight to make a search worth while. He would push on toward the Tippepahs. *Pah,* he knew, meant water in the Indian tongue. He did not know what *Tippe* signified, but since Indians lived in the Tippepah Range he was assured of two things: There was water, which meant a geologic formation which made water veins possible; and the water was drinkable. So he got stiffly to his feet, studied again the darkling sky line, sent a glance up at the first stars and turned his face and William's resolutely toward the Tippepahs.

He had applied first aid to William's knee in the form of chewed tobacco, which if it did no more at least discouraged the pestering flies. Now he collected a ride for his pay. He had reasoned that William was probably subdued to the point of permitting the liberty, and that he had other things to think of more important than protecting his mulish dignity. Casey guessed right. William switched his tail pettishly, as mules

will, and went on picking his way through brush and rocks along the ridge.

It was perhaps nine o'clock when Casey saw the light. William also spied it and stopped still, his long left ear pointed that way, his broken right ear dropping over his eye. William lifted his nose and brayed as if he were tearing loose all his vitals and the operation hurt like the mischief. Casey kicked him in the flanks and urged him on. It must be a camp fire, Casey thought. He did not connect it with that moving light he had seen the night before; that was a distinct puzzle which he would probably never solve, and it had nothing to do with a camp fire that twinkled rosily upon a distant hilltop.

From the look of it, Casey judged that it was perhaps eight miles off—perhaps less. But there was a rocky cañon or two between them, and William was lame. Yet he thought that William ought to have enough stamina to make the trip, if he were given time enough. And at the last, if William gave out, then Casey would manage to walk the rest of the way. It all depended upon giving William time enough.

You know, mules are the greatest mind readers in the world. I have always heard that, and now Casey swears that it is so. William immediately began taking his time. A turtle starting nose to nose with William would have had to pull in his feet and wait for him every half mile or so. William must have been very thirsty, too, for Casey had observed that William had declined to browse on the bushes toward evening, which is a sure sign.

The light burned steadily, hearteningly. Whenever they crawled to high ground where a view was possible Casey saw it there, just under a certain star which he had used for a marker at first. And whenever William saw the light he brayed and tried to swing around and go the other way. But Casey would not permit that, naturally. Nor did he wonder why William acted so queerly. You never wonder why a mule does things. You just fight it out and are satisfied if you win, and let it go at that.

Casey does not remember clearly the details of that night. He knows that during the long hours William balked at a particularly steep climb, and that Casey was finally obliged to get off and lead the way. It established an unfortunate precedent, for William refused to let Casey on again, and Casey was too weak to mount in spite of William. They compromised at last; that is, they both walked.

The light went out. Moreover, Casey's star that he had used to mark the spot moved over to the west and finally slid out of sight altogether. But Casey felt sure of the direction and he kept going doggedly toward the point where the light had been. He says there wasn't a rod where a snail couldn't have outrun him, and when the sky streaked red and orange and the sun came up, he stood still and looked for a camp, and when he saw nothing at all but bare rock and bushes of the kind that love barrenness, he crawled under the nearest shade, tied William fast to the bush, and slept.

You don't realize your thirst when you are asleep, and you are saving your strength instead of wearing it out in the hot sun. He remained there until the sun was almost out of sight behind a high peak. Then he got up, untied William, mounted him without argument from either, and went on, keeping to the direction in which he had seen the light.

Even the little brown mule was now having trouble keeping his feet under him and moving forward. He wavered, he picked his footing with great care when a declivity dipped before him; he stopped every few yards and rested when he was making a climb. Casey managed to hold himself on the narrow back of William, but that was all. He understood perfectly that the next twenty-four hours would tell the story for him and for William.

He had a sturdy body, however, and a sturdy brain that had never weakened its hold on facts by flying off into impossible realms of fancy. Daydreams don't count; not when they are built around material desires such as filled Casey Ryan's mental life. So he clung to his reason and pushed fear away from him and said doggedly that he would go forward as long as he could crawl or William could carry him, and he would die or he would not die, as Fate decided for him. He wondered, too, about the camp whose fire he had seen.

Then he saw the light. This time it burned suddenly clear and large and very bright, away off to the left of him where he had by daylight noticed a bare shale slide. The light seemed to stand in the very center of the slide, no more than a mile away.

William stopped when he pulled on the rope reins he had fashioned from the lead rope, and turned stiffly so that he faced the light. Casey kicked him gently with his heels to urge him forward, for in spite of what his reason told him about the shale slide, his instinct was to go straight to the light. But William began to shiver and tremble, and to swing slowly away. Casey tried to prevent it, but the mule came out in William. He laid his good ear flat along his neck as far as it would go, and took little, nipping steps until he had turned with his tail to the light. Then he thrust his fawn-colored muzzle to the stars and brayed and brayed, his good ear working like a pump handle as he tore the sounds loose from his vitals.

Casey cursed him in a whisper, having no voice left. He kicked William in the flanks, having no other means of coercion at hand. But kicking never yet altered the determination of a mule, and cursing a mule in a whisper is like blowing your breath against the sail of a becalmed sloop. William kept his tail toward the light, and furthermore he momentarily drew his tail farther and farther from that spot. Now and then he would turn his head and glance back, and immediately increase his pace perceptibly. He was long past the point where he had strength to trot, but he could walk, and he did walk and carry Casey on his back still whispering condemnation.

I don't suppose they traveled all night. They couldn't have, because Casey looked at the Big Dipper and judged it was midnight when they stopped on the brink of a deep cañon and halted there through sheer despair of William, because the light appeared suddenly on the high point of a hill directly ahead of them. William's voice was gone like Casey's so that he, too, cursed in a whisper with a spasmodic indrawing of ribs and a wheezing in his throat.

Casey slid off William's back when it was plain that the mule had stopped permanently, and lay down without knowing or caring much whether he would ever get up again. He never seemed to want to recall that time in detail. He said he wasn't hungry—much; but his mouth was too full of tongue, he added grimly.

He lay and watched through half-closed, staring eyes the light that mocked him so. His dulling senses told him that it was no camp fire, nor any light made by human hands. He did not know what it was. He didn't care, any more. William crumpled up and lay down beside him, breathing heavily. It was getting close to the end of things. Casey knew it, and so did William.

The sun found them there and forced Casey to open his eyes. He sat up painfully, the fight to live not yet burned out of him, and gazed dully at the forbidding hills that closed round him like great, naked rock demons watching to see a man die for want of the things they withheld. Where he remembered the light to have been when last he saw it, was bleak, bare rock. It was a devil's light, and there was nothing friendly or human about it.

He looked down into the cañon which William had refused to enter. A faint interest revived within him because of a patch of green. Trees—but they might easily be junipers which will grow in dry cañons as readily, it would seem, as in any other. He kept looking, because green was a great relief from the monotonous gray and black and brown of the hills. It seemed to him, after a while, that he saw a small splotch of dead white.

In the barren lands two things will show white in the distance: a white horse, and a tent of white canvas. Casey shifted his position and squinted long at the spot, then got up slowly with the help of a bush and took William by the rope. William was on his feet, standing with his head dropped, apparently half asleep. Casey knew that William was waiting until he could no longer stand.

Together they wabbled down the sloping cañon wall and over a grassy bottom to the trees, which were indeed juniper trees, but thriftier looking than their brethren of the dry places. There was water, for William smelled it at last and hurried forward with more briskness than Casey could muster, eager though he was to reach the tent he saw standing there under the biggest juniper.

Beside the tent was a water bucket of bright, new tin, and a white granite dipper stood in it. Casey drank sparingly and stopped when he would have given all he ever possessed in the world to have gone on drinking until he could hold no more. But he was not yet crazy with the thirst, and he stopped drinking, filled a white granite basin, and soused his head again and again, sighing with sheer ecstasy at the drip of water down his back and chest. After a

little he drank two swallows more, put down the dipper, and went into the tent.

II.

We can all remember certain experiences that fill us with incredulity even while we admit that the facts could be proved before a jury of twelve men. Certain things seem too strange for reality, yet we know they are perfectly real. So Casey Ryan, having lost his outfit and come so near to death that he could barely keep his feet under him, walked into a tent and stood there thinking it couldn't be true.

A folding camp chair stood near the opening, and Casey sat down from sheer weakness while he looked about him. The tent was a twelve by fourteen, which is a bit larger than one usually carries in a pack outfit. It had a canvas floor, soiled in strips where the most walking had been done but white under table and beds, which proved its newness. Casey was not accustomed to seeing tents floored with canvas, and he stared at it for a full half minute before his eyes went to other things.

There was a folding camp table, of the kind shown in the window display of sporting-goods stores, but which seasoned campers find impractical. The varnish still shone on legs and braces, which helped to prove the newness of things. There was a two-burner oil stove with an enamel-rimmed oven that was distinctly out of place in that country and yet harmonized perfectly with the tent and furnishings.

The dishes were white enamel or aluminum, and there were boxes piled upon boxes, the labels proclaiming canned things too expensive for ordinary eating. Two spring cots with new blankets and white-cased pillows stood against the tent wall, and beneath each cot sat two yellow pigskin suit cases with straps and brass buckles. They would have been perfectly natural in a Pullman sleeper, but even in his present stress Casey snorted disdainfully at sight of them here.

Things were tumbled about in the disorder of inexperienced campers, but everything was very new and clean except an array of dishes on the table, which told Casey that one man had eaten two or three meals without washing his dishes or putting away his surplus of food. Casey had eaten nothing at all after that one toasted rabbit which he had choked down on the evening when he gave up hope of finding the burros. He got up and staggered stiffly to the table and picked up a piece of burned biscuit, hard as flint.

While he mumbled a fragment of that he looked into various half-filled cans, setting them one by one in a compact group on the table corner; which was habit rather than conscious thought. Ptomaine lurked in every one of them; which was a shame, since he had to discard half a can of preserved peaches, half a can of canned roast beef, half a can of asparagus tips, a can of chicken soup scarcely touched, and two-thirds of a can of sweet potatoes. Besides these he salvaged a can of ripe olives which he thought was good, a can of India relish, and a can of sweet gherkins.

There was cold coffee in a nickel percolator, and Casey poured himself a cup, knowing well the risk of eating too much just at first. It was while he was unscrewing the top of the glass jar which held sugar that he first noticed the paper. It was folded and thrust into the sugar jar, and Casey pulled it out and held it crumpled in his hand while he sweetened and drank the coffee, forcing himself to take it slowly. When the cup was empty to the last drop he went over and sat down on the edge of a spring cot and unfolded the note. What he read surprised him a great deal and puzzled him more. I leave it to you to judge why.

I saw it again last night in a different place. The last horse died yesterday down the cañon. You can have the outfit. I'm going to beat it out of here while the going's good. FRED.

"That's mighty damn funny," Casey muttered thickly. "You can—ask——" He lay back luxuriously, with his head on the white pillow, and closed his eyes. He would not dare eat for another hour or two, and the reaction from struggling to live had set in with the assurance of his safety. He slept heavily, refreshingly.

He awoke to the craving for food, and immediately started a small fire outside and boiled coffee in a nice new aluminum pail that held two quarts and had an ornamental cover. The oil stove he dismissed from his mind with a snort of contempt. And because nearly everything he saw was catalogued in his mind as a luxury, he opened cans somewhat extravagantly and dined off strange, delectable foods to which his palate was unaccustomed. He still thought it was mighty queer, but that did not impair his appetite.

Afterward he went out to look after William, remembering that horses were said to have died in this place. William was almost within kicking distance of the shallow-pooled spring, as if he meant to keep an eye upon the water supply, even if that involved browsing off brush instead of wandering down to good grass below the camp.

Casey knelt stiffly and drank from the spring, laving his face and head afterward as if he never would get enough of the luxury of being wet and cool. He rose and stood looking at William for a few minutes, then took the lead rope and tied him to a juniper that stood near the spring. The note had said that the last horse died down the cañon, the implication of a mysterious death lying heavy behind the words.

Casey went back to the tent and read the note through again twice, studying each word as if he hoped to twist some added information out of them. It sounded as though the writer had expected his partner back from some trip, and had left the note for him. He had not considered it necessary to explain what it was that he had seen again in a different place. Casey wondered if it might not have been that devil's light which he himself had followed. Whatever it was the fellow had not liked it. His going had all the earmarks of flight; in fact, he had said that he meant to "beat it while the going's good."

Well, then, why had the last horse died down the cañon? Casey decided that he would go and see, though he was not hankering for exercise that day. He took a long drink of water, somewhat shame-facedly filled a new-looking canteen that lay on a pile of odds and ends near the tent door, and started down the cañon. It couldn't be far, but he might want a drink before he got back, and Casey had had enough of wanting.

He was not long in finding the horse that had died, and, in fact, all the horses that had died. There had been four, and the manner of their demise was not in the least mysterious. They had been staked out to graze in a luxuriant patch of loco weed, which is reason enough for any horse to die.

Of course, no man save an unmitigated tenderfoot would picket a horse on loco, which looks very much like wild pea vine and is known the West over as the deadliest weed that grows. A little of it mixed with a diet of grass will drive horses and cattle insane, and there is no authentic case of recovery, that I ever heard, once the infection is complete. A lot of it will kill—and these poor beasts had actually been staked out to graze upon it—I suppose because it looked nice and green, and the horses liked it.

The performance matched very well the enamel-trimmed oil stove and the tinned dainties and the expensive suit cases. Casey went back to camp feeling as though he had stumbled upon a picnic of feeble-minded persons. He wondered what in thunder two men of such a type could be doing out here, a hundred miles and more from an ice-cream soda and a barber's chair. He wondered, too, how "Fred" had expected to get himself across that hundred miles and more of dry, desert country. He must certainly be afoot, and the camp itself showed no sign of any emergency outfit having been assembled from its furnishings.

Casey made sure of that, inspecting first the bedding and food and then the cooking utensils. Everything was complete—lavishly so—for two men who loved comfort. Even their sweaters were there; and Casey knew they must have discovered that the nights can be cool even though the days are hot, in that altitude. And there were two canteens of the size usually carried by hikers.

Casey was so worried that he could not enjoy his supper of paté de foi gras and crackers, with pork and beans, plum pudding—eaten as cake—and spiced figs and coffee. He turned over on his spring-cot bed as often as if he had been lying on nettles, and, when he did sleep, he dreamed horribly.

Next morning he set out with William and an emergency camp outfit to trace, if he could, the missing men. The great outdoors of Nevada is not kind to such as these, and Casey had too lately suffered to think with easy-going optimism that they would manage somehow. They would die, if they were left to shift for themselves, and Casey could not pretend that he did not know it.

But there was a difficulty in rescuing them, just as there had been in rescuing the burros. Casey could not find their tracks, and so could not follow them. The writer of the note he wished most particularly to find, since he had definitely announced his intention of leaving the country afoot. Casey and William hunted the cañon from top to bottom and ranged far out on the valley floor

without discovering anything that could be called the track of a man. Which was strange, too, in a country where footprints are few and are held for a long, long while by the soil—as souvenirs of man's passing, perhaps.

So it transpired that Casey at length returned to the new tent just below the spring in the nameless cañon beyond Crazy Woman Lake. Chipmunks had invaded the place and feasted upon an opened package of sweet crackers, but otherwise it had been left inviolate. Neither Fred nor his partner had returned. Wherefore Casey opened more cans and "made himself to home," as he naïvely put it.

He was impatient to continue his journey, but since he had nothing of his own except William, he meant to beg or buy a few things from this camp. Meantime he could be comfortable, since it is tacitly understood in the open land that a wayfarer may claim hospitality of any man with or without that man's knowledge. He's expected to keep the camp clean, to leave firewood and to take nothing away with him except what is absolutely necessary to insure his getting safely to the next stopping place. Casey knew the law, and he busied himself in setting the camp in order while he waited.

But when five days and nights had slipped into history and he and William were still in sole possession, Casey began to take another viewpoint. Fred might possibly have left in a flying machine. The partner may have decamped permanently before Fred lost his nerve. Several things may have happened which would leave this particular camp and contents without a claimant. Casey studied the matter for a while and then pulled the four suit cases from beneath the cots and proceeded to investigate. The first one that he opened had a note folded and addressed to Fred. Casey read it through without the slightest compunction. The handwriting was different, hurried, and scrawly, the words connected with faint lines. Here is what Fred's partner had written:

DEAR FRED: Don't blame me for leaving you. A man that carries the grouch you do don't need company. I'm fed up on solitude and I don't like the feel of things here. My staying won't help your lung a damn bit, and if you want anything, you can hunt up the men that carry the light. Maybe they are the ones that are killing off the horses. Anyway, you can wash your own dishes from now on. It will do you good. If I had of known you were the crab you are, I'll say I would never have come. You are welcome to my share of the outfit. I hope some one shoots me and puts me out of my misery quick if I ever show symptoms of wanting to camp out again. I am going now because if I stayed I'd change your map for you so your own looking-glass wouldn't know you. I'll say you are some nut.

ART.

Casey had to take a fresh chew of tobacco before his brain would settle down, and he could think clearly. Then he observed that it was a damn funny combination, and you could ask anybody. After that he decided that he was heir to a fine assortment of canned delicacies and an oil stove and four suit cases filled, he hoped, with good clothes. Not omitting possession of two spring cots and several pairs of high-grade blankets, and two sweaters and Lord knows what all.

Those suit cases were enough to make any man sit and bite his nails, wondering if he were crazy. Fred and Art had evidently fitted their wardrobe to their ideas of a summer camp with dancing pavilion and plenty of hammocks in the immediate neighborhood. There were white flannel trousers and white canvas shoes and white silk socks, and fine ties and handkerchiefs and things. There were striped silk shirts which made Casey grin and think how tickled Injun Jim would be with them—or one or two of them; Casey had no intention of laying them all upon the altar of diplomacy. There was an assortment of apparel in those suit cases that would qualify any man as porch hound at Del Monte. And Casey Ryan, if you please, had fallen heir to the lot!

He dressed himself in white flannels with a silk shirt of delf-blue and pale-green stripes, and wished that there was a looking-glass in camp large enough to reflect all of him at once. Then, because his beard stubble did not harmonize, he shaved with one of the safety razors he found.

After that he sorted and packed a careful wardrobe, and stored strange food into two canvas kyacks. And the next morning he tied the tent flaps carefully and fared forth with William to find the camp of Injun Jim and see if his dream would come true.

You may not believe this next incident. I know I did not, when Casey told me about it—but now I am not so sure. Casey said that the light appeared again, moving slowly along the lip of the cañon like a man with a large lantern. There was a full moon, which

had made him decide to travel at night on account of the heat while the sun was up. But the moon did not reveal the cause of the light, though the cañon crest was plainly visible to him.

William swung away from that light and walked rather briskly in the other direction, and Casey did not argue with him. So they headed almost due west and kept going. It seemed to Casey once or twice that the light followed them; but he could not be sure.

Two full nights he journeyed, and on both nights he had the light behind him. Once it came up swiftly to within a mile or so of him and William, and stopped there for a while, and then disappeared. Casey camped rather early and slept, and took the trail again in the morning. Night travel was getting on his nerves.

All that day he walked, and toward evening, with thunderheads piling high above the Tippepahs, he came upon a small herd of Indian ponies feeding out from the mouth of a wide gulch. He knew they were Indian ponies, by their size, their variegated colors, and their general unkemptness. They presently spied him and went galloping off up the gulch, and Casey followed until he spied a thin, bluish ribbon of smoke wavering up toward the slate-black clouds.

He made camp just out of sight around a point of rocks from the smoke, stretching the canvas tarp which had floored the tent, to make shelter between two bowlders. He changed his clothes, dressing himself carefully in the white-flannel trousers, blue-and-green striped silk shirt, tan belt, white shoes, and his old Stetson tilted over his right eye at the characteristic Casey angle.

He was taking it for granted that an Indian camp lay under that smoke, and he knew Indians. Inquisitiveness would shut them up as effectively as poking a stick at a clam; but there were ways of coaxing their interest, nevertheless, and when an Indian is curious you have the trumps in your own hand and it will be your own fault if you lose.

Casey's manner, therefore, was extremely preoccupied when he led a suddenly limping William up the gulch and past a stone hut with a patched tepee alongside it. A lean squaw stood erect before the tepee and regarded him fixedly from under the shade of a mahogany-colored hand. When Casey came closer she stooped and ducked out of sight like a prairie dog diving into its burrow. Casey paid no attention to that. He knew without being told that he was under close scrutiny from eyes unseen; which was what he desired and had prepared for.

The spring, as he had guessed, was above the camp. He threw a rock at two yammering curs that rushed out at him, and drove them back with Caseyish curses. Then he watered William at the trampled spring, made himself a smoke, and went back down the gulch. Opposite the tepee the squaw stood beside the trail. Casey grinned amiably and said "hello."

"Yo' ketchum 'bacco? My man, him heap sick. Mebby die. Likeum 'bacco, him." The squaw muttered it as if she would rather not speak, but had been commanded to beg tobacco from the stranger.

"Why, sure I got tobacco!" Casey's tone was a bit more friendly than before. He pulled a small red can from his shirt pocket, hesitated, and then tied William to a bush. "Too bad your man sick. Mebby I can help him. He in here?"

The squaw gestured uncertainly, and Casey stooped and went into the tepee.

Inside it was so dark that he stood still just within the opening to get his bearings. This happened to be very good form in Indian society, and Casey lost nothing by the pause. He dimly saw that a few blankets lay untidily against the tepee wall and that an old Indian lay stretched upon them, watching Casey with one black eye, the other lid lying in sunken folds across the socket.

Casey was for once in his life speechless. He had not expected to walk straight into the camp of Injun Jim. He had thought that, of course, he would have to go on to Round Butte and glean information there, perhaps; or if he were exceptionally lucky, he would meet Indians who would tell him what he wanted to know. But here was a one-eyed buck, and he was old, and he lived in the Tippepahs—Injun Jim by all description.

"Your squaw say you want tobacco." Casey advanced and held out the red can. He knew better than to waste words, especially in the beginning. Indians are peculiar; you must approach them by not seeming to approach at all.

The old fellow grunted and turned the can over and over in clawlike hands, and said he wanted a match and a paper. Casey went farther and rolled a cigarette and gave it to him, and then rolled one for himself.

They smoked, there in that unsavory tepee, saying nothing at all. Casey had achieved the first part of his dream; he was making friends with Injun Jim.

Later he went down to his own camp, leading William. It was hard to wait and watch for the proper moment to broach the subject that filled his mind, and then induce the old Indian to talk. Casey was beginning to understand why no one had wormed the secret from Jim. It is one thing to decide that you will do so and so and handle the matter differently from the bungling other men you have heard about, when you are hundreds of miles and many months distant from the problem.

To find Injun Jim and get him to tell where his gold mine was had seemed fairly easy to Casey when he was driving stage elsewhere, and could only think about it. But, when he sat on his haunches in the tepee, smoking with Injun Jim and conversing intermittently of such vital things as the prospect of rain that night and the enforced delay in his journey because his pack mule was lame, speaking of gold mines was not at all easy.

However, Casey ate a very hearty supper and went to bed with the problem of somehow winning the old fellow's gratitude. Morning did not bring a solution, as it properly should have done. He ransacked his pack and finally chose a small glass jar of blackberry jam and a little can of maple sirup, fortified himself with another red can of tobacco, and went up to the camp. As for medicine, he hadn't a drop, and if he had, he did not know what ailed Injun Jim, unless it was just old age and general cussedness.

Injun Jim ate the jam, first using a deadly looking knife and later his fingers, when the jam got low in the jar. When he had finished that he opened the can and drank the maple sirup just as he would have drunk whisky—with a relish. He smoked Casey's tobacco in a stone pipe which the squaw brought him, and appeared fairly well satisfied with life. But he did not talk much, and what he did say was of no importance whatever. Not once did he mention gold mines.

Casey went back to camp and swore at William, and counted his cans of luxuries. He did not realize that he had established a dangerous precedent, but when he led William up to water, meaning to pass by the camp without stopping, the squaw halted him on his way back and told him briefly that her man wanted him.

Injun Jim did not want Casey; he wanted more jam. Casey went back to camp and got another can, this time of strawberry, and in a spirit of peevishness added a small tin of the liver paste that had caused him a night's discomfort. He took them to the tepee, and Injun Jim ate the complete contents of both cans and seemed somehow dissatisfied afterward. So much so that he would not talk at all, but smoked in brooding reticence, staring with his one malevolent eye at the stained wall of the tepee.

An hour later he began to move himself restlessly in the blankets and to mutter Piute words the full meaning of which Casey did not grasp. But he would not answer when he was spoken to—would only glare; so Casey went back to his camp. And that night Injun Jim was very sick.

Next day, however, he was sufficiently recovered to want more jam. Casey filled his pockets with small cans and doled them out one by one, and gossiped artfully while he watched Injun Jim eat pickles, India relish, and jelly with absolute, inscrutable impartiality. Casey felt sympathetic qualms in his own stomach just from watching the performance, but he was talking for a gold mine and he did not stop.

"You know 'Willow Pete?' " he asked garrulously. "Big, tall man. Drinks whisky all the time. Willow Pete found a gold mine two moons ago. He's rich now. Got a big barrel of whisky. Got silk shirts like this" —he plucked at his own silken sleeve—"got lots of jam all the time. Every day drinks whisky and eats jam."

"Hunh!" Injun Jim ran his forefinger dexterously around the inside of a jelly glass and licked the finger with the nonchalance of a two-year-old. "Hunh! Got heap big gol' mine, me. No can go ketchum two year, mebby. I dunno. Feet no damn good for walk. Back no damn good for ride. No ketchum gol' long time now."

Casey took a chew of tobacco. This was getting to the point he had been aiming for, and he needed his wits working at top speed.

"Well, if you got a gold mine, you can eat jam all the time. Drink whisky, too," he added, hushing his conscience peremptorily. "If you've got a white man that's your friend, he might take your gold to town and buy whisky and jam."

Injun Jim considered, his finger searching for more jelly. "White man no good for Injun, mebby. I dunno. Ketchum gol', no givum. Tell all white mans. Heap mans come. White man horses eat grass. Drink all water. Shootum deer, shootum rabbit, shootum all damn time. Make big house. Heap noise all time. No place Injuns no more. No good."

"White men not all same, Jim. One white man maybe good friend. Help get gold, give you half. You buy lots of jam, lots of whisky, lots of silk shirts, have good time." Casey looked at him straight. He could do it, because he meant what he said; even the whisky, I regret to say.

Injun Jim accepted a cigarette and smoked it, saying never a word. Casey smoked the mate to it and waited, trying to hide how his fingers trembled. Injun Jim turned himself painfully on the blankets and regarded Casey steadily with his one suspicious eye. Casey met the look squarely.

"You got more shirt?" Jim's finger pointed at the blue and green stripes. "Yo' got more Jam? Yo' bringum. Heap sick me. Mebby die. Me no takeum gol', me die. No wantum, me die. Yo' mebby good man. I dunno. Me ketchum heap jam, ketchum heap silk shirt, ketchum heap 'bacco, heap whisky, me tellum yo' where ketchum gol' mine. Me die, yo' heap rich——"

He turned suddenly, lifted his right arm and sent his knife swishing through the air. It sliced its way through the tepee wall and hung there quivering, caught by the hilt. Injun Jim called out vicious, Piute words. "Hahnaga!" he commanded fiercely. "Hahnaga!"

The lean old squaw came meekly, stood just within the tepee while her lord spat words at her. She answered apathetically in Piute and backed out. Presently she returned, herding before her a young squaw whom Casey had not before seen. The young squaw was holding a hand upon her other arm, and Casey saw blood between her fingers. The young squaw was not particularly meek. She stood there sullen, while Injun Jim berated her in the Indian tongue, and once she spat out a retort that made the old man's fingers go groping over the blankets for a weapon; whereat the young squaw laughed contemptuously and went out, sending Casey a side glance and a fleeting smile as full of coquetry as ever white woman could employ.

The interruption silenced the old buck upon the subject of gold. Casey sat there and chewed tobacco and waited, schooling his impatience as best he could. Injun Jim muttered in Piute, or lay with his one eye closed. But Casey knew that he did not sleep; his thin lips were drawn too tense for slumber. So he waited.

Injun Jim opened his eye suddenly, looked all around the tepee, and then stared fixedly at Casey. "Young squaw no good. Heap much white talk. Stealum gol' mine, mebby. I dunno." He gestured for his knife, and Casey got it for him. Injun Jim fondled it evilly.

"Bimeby killum. Mebby. I dunno. Yo' ketchum jam, ketchum shirt—how many jam yo' ketchum?"

Casey meditated a while. He had not planned an exclusive jam diet for Injun Jim, therefore his supply was getting low. But at the tenderfoot camp was much more, enough to last Injun Jim to the border of the happy hunting ground—if he did not loiter too long upon the way. For certain reasons, born of experience, Casey guessed that the old man had cancer; there was no telling how long he would eat jam, but Casey was a good gambler.

"If I go get a lot more, and get silk shirts —six," he counted with his fingers, "you tell me where your gold mine is."

"Yo' bringum heap jam, bringum shirt. Me tellum." His one eye was bright. "Yo' bringum jam. Yo' bringum shirt. Yo' giveum me." He patted the bare dirt beside the blankets, signifying that he wanted the jam and shirts there, within reach of his hand. He even twisted his cruel old lips into a smile. "Me tellum. Me shakeum hand, mebby. I dunno."

He held out his left hand and Casey clasped it soberly, much as he wanted to jump up and crack his heels together—as he confided afterward. Injun Jim laid the blade of his knife across the clasped hands.

"Yo' lie me, yo' die quick. Injun god biteum. Mebby snake. I dunno. How long yo' ketchum heap jam, heap shirt?"

Now that he knew the way, Casey had in mind a certain short cut that would subtract two days from the round trip. He held up his hand, fingers spread, and got up. Then the thought of the threat and added one of his own.

"I've got a god, myself, Jim. You lie about that gold mine and the jam'll choke

yuh to death. You can ask anybody." He went out and straightway packed for the journey. Fate, he told himself, was playing partners with him. I don't suppose Casey, even in his most happy-go-lucky mood, had ever been quite so content with life as when he returned to the camp of the tenderfeet for a mule load of jam and silk shirts. Trading an old muzzle-loading shotgun to an Indian chief for the future site of a great city could not have seemed more of a bargain in the days of our forefathers.

He made the trip almost half a day sooner than he had promised, and went straight up to Injun Jim's camp with his load. He was whistling all the way up the cañon to the tepee; but then he stopped. Inside the hut was the sound of wailing. Casey tried not to guess what that meant. He tied William and went to the door of the tepee.

The young squaw came from within and stood just before the opening, regarding Casey with that maddening, Indian immobility. She did not speak, though Casey waited for fully two minutes, nor did she move aside to let him go in. Casey grinned disarmingly.

"Me ketchum heap jam for Injun Jim. Heap silk shirts. Me go tellum," he said.

"Are those they?" the young squaw inquired, and pointed to William. Casey jumped. Any man would, hearing that impeccable sentence issue from the lips of a squaw with a blanket over her head.

"Uh-huh," he gulped.

"My father is dead. He died yesterday from eating too much pickles that you left for him. I should like to have what you have brought to give to him. I should thank you for silk shirts. I can fix them so that I can wear them. I will talk to you pretty soon about that gold mine. I know where it is. I have helped my father bring the gold away.

"My father would not tell you if you gave him all the jam and all the silk in the world. My father was awful mean. I thought he would maybe kill you, and that is why I listened beside the tepee. I wished to protect you because I know that you are a good man. Will you give me the silk shirts and the jam?"

She smiled then, and Casey saw that she had a gold tooth in front, which further demonstrated how civilized she was. "You will excuse the way I am dressed. I wished to dress so that I would please my father. He was very mean with me all the time. He did not like me because I have gone to school and got a fine education. He wanted me to be all Indian. But I knew that my father is a chief and that makes me just what you would say a princess, and I wished to learn how to be educated like all white ladies. So I took some gold from my father's mine, and I spent the money for going to school. My name," she added impressively, "is Lucy Lily. What is your name?"

"Er—Casey Ryan," he stuttered, floundering in the mental backwash left by this flood of amazing eloquence.

"I like that name. I think I will have you for my friend. Do not talk to my mother, Hahnaga. She is foolish. She tells lies all the time about me. She does not like me because I have went to school and got a fine educate. Now you get me the silks. I will put on a pretty dress. My father is dead now and I can do what I wish to do. I am not afraid of my mother. My mother does not know where to find the gold mine. You will have to be a friend to Lucy Lily and make her tell you where to find it."

Casey is a simple soul, too trustful by far. He was embarrassed by the arch smile which Lucy Lily gave him, and he wished vaguely that she was the blanket squaw she looked to be. But it never occurred to Casey that there might be a wily purpose behind her words. He unpacked William and gave her the things he had brought for Injun Jim, and retired with his camp outfit to the spring to think things over, while he boiled himself a pot of coffee and fried bacon.

Lucy Lily appeared like an unwarranted vision before him. Casey likened her coming to a nightmare. If Injun Jim objected to civilized apparel for squaws, Casey wondered why the old buck did not materialize there before them in scandalized wrath.

Lucy Lily wore a red silk skirt much spotted with camp grease. A three-cornered tear in the side had been sewed with long stitches and coarse white thread; even Casey was outraged by the unworkmanlike job. She had on one of the silk shirts, which happened to be striped in many shades, none of which harmonized with the basic color of the skirt. She had on two cheap necklaces whose luster had long since faded, and her hair was coiled on top of her head and adorned with three combs containing many white glass settings.

Her face was powdered thickly to the

point of her jaws, with very red cheek bones and very red lips. She wore once-white slippers with French heels much run over at the side, and red silk stockings with great holes in the heels. I must add that the shirt was too narrow so that her arms bulged and there were gaping spaces between the buttons. And for a belt she wore a wide, blue ribbon very much creased and soiled, as if she had used it for a long while as a hair bow.

She sat down upon a rock and watched Casey fumble his cooking. She must have had a great deal of initiative for a squaw, for she plunged straight into the subject which most nearly concerned Casey, and she was frank to the point of appalling bluntness.

"Do you like me when I have pretty dress on?" she inquired, smoothing the red silk complacently over her knees.

Casey swears that he told her it didn't make a darn bit of difference to him what she wore. If that is the truth, Lucy Lily must have been very stupid or very persistent, for she went on blandly stating her plans and her dearest wish.

"That gold mine I am keeping for my husband," she announced. "It is a present for wedding gift for my man. I shall not marry Indian man. I am too pretty and I have a gold mine and I will marry a white man. Indians don't know what money is good for. I want to live in a town and wear silk dresses all the time, every day, and ride in a blue automobile and have lots of rings and go to shows. Have you got lots of silk shirts?"

I don't know what Casey told her. He says he swore he hadn't another silk shirt to his name.

"I think you have got money. I think, perhaps, you are rich. I don't see white men walk in the desert with silk shirts and have lots of jam and pickles, if they are not rich. I think you want that gold mine awful bad. You gave Jim lots of jam so he would tell you. White men want lots of more money when they have got lots of money. It is like that in shows. If a man is poor he don't care. If a man is rich he is hunting all the time for more money. So I think you are like them rich mans in shows."

Casey told her he was poor, but she couldn't have believed him—not in the face of all the silks and sweets he had displayed.

"I am glad Jim is dead. Now you have gave me the things. We will go to Tonopah and you will buy a blue automobile and we will ride in it. And you will buy me lots of silk and rings. I shall be a lady like a princess in a show."

"Your mother has got something to say about that gold mine," Casey blurted desperately. "It's hers, by rights. She'd have to go fifty-fifty on it. She's got it coming, and I never cheated anybody yet. I ain't going to commence on an old squaw."

"She is a big fool. What you think Hahnaga want of money? The agent he gives her blankets and tea and flour. If you give Hahnaga silk I will be awful mad. She is old. She will die pretty quick."

"Well," said Casey, "I dunno as any of us has got any cinch on living. And if there's a gold mine in the family, she sure has got to have an even break. What about old Jim? Buried him yet?"

"He's in the tepee. I think Hahnaga will dig a grave. I don't care. I will go with you and we will find the gold mine. Then you will buy me——"

"I'll buy you nothin'!" Casey's tone was emphatic.

Lucy Lily looked at him steadily. "Before we go to the gold mine we will go to Tonopah and get marriage and you will give me a gold ring on my finger. Then I will show you where is gold so much you will have money to buy the world full of things." She smiled at him, showing her gold tooth. "I like you for my man," she said. "I am pretty. I have lots of fellows. I could marry lots of white mans, but I will marry you."

"Like hell you will!" snorted Casey, and began to wipe out his frying pan and empty his coffeepot and make other preparations for packing. "Like hell you'll marry me. Think I'd marry a squaw——"

"Then I will not tell you where is the gold! Then I hate you and I will fix you good! You want gold mine awful bad. You will marry me before I tell you."

Casey straightened and looked at her, his frying pan in one hand, his coffeepot in the other. "Say, I never asked you, did I? I done my talkin' to Injun Jim. It's you that butted in here on this deal. Seein' he's dead, I'll talk to his squaw and make a deal with her, mebby." He looked her over measuringly. "Princess—hunh! I'll tell yuh what you are, if yuh don't git outa here

and quit talking. I may want a gold mine, all right, but I sure don't want it that bad. Git when I tell yuh to git!"

A squaw with no education would have got forthwith. But Lucy Lily had learned to be like white ladies—or so she said. She screamed at him in English, in Piute, and chose words in each that no princess should employ to express her emotions. Her loud denunciations followed Casey to the tepee, where he stopped and offered his services to Hahnaga as undertaker.

She accepted stolidly and together they buried Injun Jim, using his best blanket and not much ceremony. Casey did not know the Piute customs well enough to follow them, and his version of the white man's funeral service was simple in the extreme. Hahnaga, however, brought two bottles of pickles and one jar of preserves which had outlasted Injun Jim's appetite, and put them in the grave with him, together with his knife and an old rifle and his pipe.

To dig a grave and afterward heap the dirt symmetrically over a discarded body takes a little time, no matter how cursory is the proceeding. Casey ceased to hear Lucy Lily's raucous voice and so thought that she had settled down and would leave him alone. He misjudged the red princess. She was like a child, quiet because she was in mischief. He discovered that when he went back to where William had stood.

William no longer stood there. He was gone, pack and all, and once more Casey stood equipped for desert journeying with shirt, overalls, shoes, and socks and his old Stetson, and with half a plug of tobacco, a pipe and a few matches in his pocket. On the bush where William had been tied, a piece of paper was impaled and fluttered in the wind. Casey jerked it off and read the even, carefully formed script, and swore:

> DEAR SIR: I am going to Tonopah. If you try to come I will tell the sherf to coming and see Jim and put you in jail. I will tell the judge you killed him and the sherf will see the place where he was cut with nife. Those are fine shirts. I will wear them silk. As ever your friend,
>
> LUCY LILY.

Casey sat down on a rock to think it over. The squaw was within the hut, moving about collecting her pitifully few belongings; for an Indian does not like to stay where one has died. Casey could overtake Lucy Lily, if he walked fast and did not stop when dark fell, but he did not want to overtake her. He did not want to see her again or hear her or think of her.

He was not particularly alarmed at her threat of the sheriff. If Injun Jim had a knife thrust to hurry his going, Casey thought that he knew who had given it, and a child could understand why. But of what benefit to Injun Jim would be inquest, trial, conviction? He might have lived to enjoy another orgy or two of jam, and suffer another night or two of colic—but Casey could see no other possible benefit which Jim had sacrificed with his life.

So Casey tore up the note, and went and begged a little food from Hahnaga. Also he broached the subject of the gold mine. The squaw listened, looking at him with dull black eyes and a face like a stamped leather portrait of an Indian. She shook her head and pointed down the gulch.

"No find gol', bad girl. I think killum my mans. I dunno. No fin' gol'—Jim he no tellum. No tellum me, no tellum girl, no tellum nobody. I think, all time Jim hide." She made gestures as if one covering something with dirt. "Lucy all time try for fin' gol'. Jim he no likum. Lucy my slister girl. Bad. No good. All time heap mean. All time tellum heap big lie so Indian no likeum. One time take monee, go 'way off. School for write. Come back for fin' gol', make Jim tellum. Jim sick long time. Jim no tellum. Jim all time mad for Lucy. Las' night—talk mean—mebby fight—Jim he die quick. Lucy say killum me I tell.

"Now me go my brother. Walk two day. Give you grub—no got many grub. You takeum gol' you fin'. Me no care. No want. You don't give Lucy. Lucy bad girl all time. No fin' gol'—Jim he no tellum. I think gol' all gone. I dunno."

That left Casey exactly where he had been before he found Injun Jim. There was no getting around it—the squaw repeated her statements twice, which Casey thought was probably more talking than she had done before in the course of six months. The point is that she impressed Casey as being truthful. She really did not know any more about Injun Jim's mine than Casey did. Or perhaps a little more, because she knew, poor thing, just how drunk Jim could get and did get on the whisky they gave him for the gold. He used to beat her terribly when he came to camp drunk. Casey learned that much more, but it didn't help him any.

Hahnaga did not seem to think that any-

thing need be done about the manner of Jim's death. She said he was heap sick and would die anyway, or words—not many—to that effect. Casey decided to forget such things as sheriffs and courtrooms, and go on and mind his own business.

He did not see why, he said, the county of Nye should be let in for a lot of expense on Injun Jim's account. And as for punishing Lucy Lily, he was perfectly willing that it should be done, only he did not want to do it. I have always believed that Casey was afraid she might possibly marry him in spite of himself, if she were left in his immediate neighborhood long enough.

They made themselves each a small pack of food and what was more vital, water, and went their different ways. Hahnaga struck off to the west, to her brother at the end of Forty-Mile Cañon. At last, that was where she said her brother mostly camped. Casey retraced his steps for the second time, to the camp of the tenderfeet. Loco Cañon, Casey calls the place.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

GOIN' A-MILKING

WISE farmers have long recognized that conservation of soil fertility, through diversified farming, is essential to a sound building up of farm prosperity. Recognizing that diversified farming means nothing more nor less than going into the growing of live stock, the people's representatives in the North Dakota legislature have provided a way by which farmers unable to finance themselves may acquire dairy live stock.

The Dairy Association Law—State Senate Bill No. 30—has made it the duty of county commissioners to issue county bonds, and with the proceeds thereof to purchase cattle for dairy purposes and sell them to persons who have formed themselves into an association as provided by the act. It is provided that such bonds shall be issued whenever a petition in writing by not fewer than fifty resident freeholders in a county has been received by the county commissioners. As for the dairy associations themselves, ten or more persons may form one, which shall be governed by such rules and regulations as may be prescribed by the dairy association and approved by the county commissioners. These regulations must include provisions for the insurance of animals purchased; for the protection and breeding of such animals; and for the selling of unprofitable stock and the disposal of funds derived from such sales. In a recent cattle census it was estimated that there were over four hundred thousand milch cows in North Dakota the total value of which was figured to be over thirty-four million dollars.

To become a member of a dairy association one must agree to comply with all its regulations until all obligations for purchase of stock have been met. Members are jointly and severally liable for all contracts, debts, and obligations due to the county from an association, to the extent of ten per cent in addition to the purchase price of such cattle as each member shall receive through the association. No person can become a member of an association without the written consent of two-thirds of all others proposing to form it.

It is felt that the inauguration of this system will go far toward insuring permanent farm prosperity in the State. Next in importance to it, to this end, is establishment of effective local coöperation for the standarizing and marketing of products and securing of credit. But, once an association has been formed it should be relatively easy to extend its functions to include other agricultural activities best carried on by coöperation.

The Quenchless Spark

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "The Implacable Friend," "Who Am I? Can't Y' See?" Etc.

"Hard-luck" Spinks didn't care what was said about himself, but when reflections were cast on his people that was something else again, and more than one storm broke loose around the *Valencia*

"WELL, are we gettin' there?" asked Steve McPherson, from the lower bunk, as "Hard-luck" Spinks entered the stateroom of the big Yukon river boat, the *Sarah*.

"We surely are," replied Spinks. "Just rounding the point, and St. Michael part way in sight."

The announcement seemed to interest the occupant of the middle bunk, "Burly Tom" Chenery. He inverted upon his chest the tattered volume of Bertha M. Clay that he was reading, and removed the pipe from his mouth.

"Hell you say!" he observed cheerfully. "Guess we better pack all our trunks and bandboxes and be ready to climb ashore."

"I'm more'n ready, m'self," stated McPherson. He carefully worked himself out of his low-roofed couch, got on his feet and stretched. "Goin' out again?" This to Spinks, who had reopened the door.

"Might as well. I'd only be in the way of you fellows."

"Ain't you goin' to pack?"

"Pack what!" snapped Spinks before he stepped out and shut the door.

"He ain't got much, fer a fact," observed Chenery to his remaining roommate.

"Now, ain't that *strange!*" McPherson grinned.

"Meanin' that the last ground he worked was that Mocha and Java creek claim I sold him. All right, old sport, I admit I ain't lettin' loose of bonanza ground. I gen'ally aim to work that kind m'self. But what would be the good of sellin' him a pay streak, anyhow? He'd hoodoo the best claim in Alaska. His name and jinx makes poetry! If the stuff was there he couldn't find it, and if so be it was plumb under his nose, why he'd run in the hole a-minin' it out. Ain't no miner, is he?"

"Had chances to be," ruminated McPherson, jamming a mangy hairbrush into his dunnage bag.

"Many of 'em," agreed Chenery, as he heaved an old leather valise into his bunk. "Always says his fambly keeps him broke. Never saw a hard-luck stiff yet didn't whine about his fambly on the outside. Well, his fambly sure has *my* sympathy."

He was about thirty-five, a ruddy, genial man of the outdoor world, rough, vital, fearless.

Up and down the narrow deck walked Hard-luck Spinks, baptized James, but known as Jim only to the few who liked him well enough to refrain from using a nickname whose patness was its sting.

The passengers—all bound for "Seattle and the outside"—were crowding the rail, intently watching the craft in the harbor and the nearing wharves. But Spinks eyed the stateroom. His pacings never took him far from it. Out of it, presently, came Steve McPherson with his dunnage bag. Through the door Spinks saw Tom Chenery, sitting on the only furniture of the little room that was not a fixture—a stout camp stool. On the floor was his old valise, strapped. Spinks edged around the dunnage bag and stepped into the room.

"Guess I'll wash up, anyhow, and get together what little I've got." His voice was rueful—quite genuinely so.

"Goin' to stay till we dock?" asked McPherson, who wanted to see what was going on and hated to lug that dunnage bag around the deck with him.

"I'd just as lief," replied Spinks indifferently.

"Then watch this, too, will you?" asked Chenery, indicating with his foot his plethoric grip.

"Sure," said Spinks in the same casual tone.

The two men left the stateroom and

found places at the rail. The scene before them was one upon which a generation of fortune seekers of the Far North had looked since the Yukon River first whispered to the old fur traders of Alaska the magic word "gold!" The great subarctic river has so shoaled the Bering Sea coast upon which it debouches that no ocean steamers can approach it. But eighty miles northward of its intricate, shallow delta, in the deep waters of Norton Sound, the Russians found a protected harbor, that of St. Michael. Here the ocean vessels transferred their passengers and cargoes to the stern-wheeled river steamers and received in exchange the Yukon gold and its diggers for transport to the great "outside."

It was October, which is late for navigation in far northern waters. The figures touching elbows at the rail of the *Sarah* were clothed in Mackinaws. A recent storm had left traces of snow in the gulleys of the bare, bleak hills. The scene threatened winter, save for one object which, with St. Michael, divided the eager attention of the passengers. It was the black hull of a steamer, riding at anchor in the roadstead—the latest vessel of the open season, the last chance to make "God's country" before the crackling cold should snap shut the seaward gateway to the States.

"Say, Steve, did you ever stand on one of these things before?" asked Tom Chenery, a few hours later, as they waited their turn in the line that reached up to the purser's office.

On shore, the passengers of the *Sarah* had bought their tickets and secured their accommodations, and when the *Valencia* signaled "ready" a lighter, towed by a diminutive tug, had taken them out to the steamer. Climbing the steps, about half of them had immediately sought their quarters in stateroom or steerage. The rest were taking their valuables to the purser for safe-keeping.

Chenery's question was a delicate one between old-timers. It implied a suspicion that the other might have lacked in his pre-Alaskan days the experience and culture of a "traveled" person.

Steve was truthful. "Don't know as I ever did. I come into the country by the Inside Passage. No ocean steamer needed there. Smooth as a mill pond. How about you?"

"Nope," was the equally honest reply. "I'm a Chilcoot man, too. Puget Sound boats was the only seagoin' I ever had. Gosh, man, but she do stand high up out of the water. Seems like she's bound to flop over soon as a wave hits her."

"The load's all out of her. That's why she sticks up this a way."

"All right, sir. What name?" asked the purser. They had moved up to the door, and McPherson was next.

He drew from his sagging pockets several objects and gave them to the officer, who tagged them and handed the miner a hastily scrawled receipt. Then Burly Tom Chenery, setting his valise on the sill of the door, raised the cover and drew from under a soiled blue-flannel shirt a number of rather long and thick moosehide pokes. He paused, his ruddy face slightly changing color.

"One short!" he muttered.

"Matter, Tom?" asked McPherson.

"One's gone," replied Chenery in a low tone. "Smallest one, too; ain't that funny?"

"Well, folk's idees of what's funny is awful different!"

"You damn fool, ye, I said it's queer the guy would take the smallest one!"

"Sorry," said the purser briskly, as he took the other pokes. "Any suspicion?"

Chenery hesitated and frowned. "Nope," he said crisply.

With McPherson, he strolled down the deck and joined a group of upriver men who were waiting for the white-coated "flunkies," as they were contemptuously termed, to show them their rooms. A hint of the colloquy between Tom Chenery and the purser had reached this group, borne by the man ahead of McPherson, old Phil Buckley.

"Matter, partner? Lose something?" asked Red O'Donnell sympathetically.

"Lose something!" repeated Chenery in feigned surprise. It did not suit his purpose to squeal.

"Didn't I hear that guy with the greasy uniform mention about your suspicionin' something?" asked Buckley.

Chenery turned a cold eye on him. "Sure—suspicionin' *him*. 'Don't get 'em one short, now!' I says." There was a laugh.

"You're liable to lose your whole clean-up if you get that there blue cap down on you," warned O'Donnell.

"B'God I'll take a chance on him, if he will on me!" declared Chenery significantly. "Hey, boy! I'm next!"

"What number's your room, sir?" asked the whitecoat. The burly miner was smoking a banded cigar; he looked prosperous. "I'll take your grip on my next trip."

"All right. It's number eighteen, upper berth," said Chenery, giving the valise a disdainful kick. It contained now nothing of great value. He turned away from the chatting group and went forward slowly, interested in the unfamiliar scene, observing the superstructure of the vessel and its strange equipment, watching the hurried movements of the deck hands, some swinging a boat in on its davits, others at the capstan bars winding in the heavy anchor chain.

But always his eye roved among the passengers until, finally, it stopped at the back of Hard-luck Spinks who was sitting on the drum of a steam hoist, looking at the still open forehatch of the vessel. Chenery strolled up to him.

"Hullo, Spinks, I was lookin' for you!"

"Just come aboard?" asked the unlucky one, ignoring the "looking for you."

"I just did," replied Chenery, "and give my pokes to the guy that runs the iron safe. One of them's been stole out of my grip."

"Why, is that so?" The inflection was one of sympathetic interest.

"They was all there when I strapped up the grip on the *Sarah* this morning, and left it in the room, with you watchin' it. You said you'd keep your eye on it till we come back."

"I know you did," replied Spinks, looking at the buttons of the other's dingy plaid Mackinaw.

"Well, *I've* had my eye on it ever since, and nobody's got into it, you can bet your damn life on that. You say you stayed in the room all the time till Steve and I come back?"

"Well, now, let me see." Spinks cocked an eye in careful retrospection. "I *may* have stepped out for just a moment to throw some trash overboard. Trash is about all I got." A slight whine, very familiar to those who knew Hard-luck Spinks, crept into his voice.

"That's all?" Chenery's eyes narrowed.

"Well, now that I think of it, I may have stood a minute or so looking at a launch. It couldn't have been long."

Chenery looked him over one searching moment. "You ain't much of a watchdog, air ye—*whatever other kind ye may be!*" Angrily, he turned and walked away.

Spinks gnawed his upper lip. His melancholy eyes held hate. He stood as Chenery had left him.

Presently he heard and felt the churn of the propeller. The old *Valencia,* at her slow but steady pace, was putting straight for sea, and soon there would be nothing but the sea—a new experience to this man but a welcome one. For the Alaska of his isolation, of his martyrdom, would be blotted out. Southward it would be, ever southward, under the propulsion of that guttural chug—with no reminders of those hideous years of failure-cursed struggle except the presence of these alien men—these miners and traders and adventurers who were "going out," many to joyfully return again! Nine, ten, perhaps eleven days of this blessed chug, and he would be back to his own, his loved and miserable own!

All his life he had toiled. As a teacher—only a fair one—he had toiled with his brain, on starvation pay. But here in the land that was fading—a land of great loneliness for the educated man of an unlikable personality—he had toiled as a miner with both brain and body. He had had, he now knew, no aptitude for it, no mechanical, no business sense. He had been an utter failure; and in the end, in the very end—God, a worse than failure! He, a religious man, to have come to this!

The shores were fading. For days that would seem an eternity but would, after all, be few, there would be just the sea and the half-pitying, half-contemptuous banter of these coarse men—with silence and perhaps a sinister look from that keen devil of a Chenery who had sold him a worked-out claim!—and then—he would be through with the nightmare of it forever!

Ah, but *would* he? At least he could pray!

The *Valencia* was a wooden ship and, in her time, a good one, a thing of pride. Too small now for the keenly competitive traffic of more southern seas, obsolete in design and equipment, even her stanchness of hull not above suspicion, she had yet managed to hold her own in the Alaska trade—which, after all, is but faint praise!

She steamed through Bering Sea like a duck in a puddle, but at the Aleutian Islands she sniffed a nor'easter. It was the delayed equinoctial gale, disguised by the protecting wall of volcanoes of Unimak Pass as a

mere stiff blow. Out of the straits, in the Pacific, a blast struck the high-standing hull on her port quarter and heeled her, creaking, nearly to her beam ends.

No doubt she had weathered some nasty gales in her time, even after she was condemned to the northern run; but when she bucked those surging ridges of blue-black water an underwriter would have called her a rather poor risk. But buck them she had to, or drift foul of the islands; and the *Valencia's* captain put her into it, three points northward off his course, to keep out of a trough in which his empty hull might turn turtle. He risked his deck structures in doing it, but with an iron bridge under him and well-battened hatches he took the chance.

The night before, the latest passengers to retire had been literally blown into their rooms on the port side of the boat. But they were close in the lee of the land, and the fretted sea was level as a floor. With the first streaks of dawn, when the ship, emerging from the last shelter, careened to her beam ends, every passenger on the vessel was either thrown against the wall of their berth or out upon the floor of their staterooms, and the mischief began.

Starboard passengers fled from their cabins and slid to the rail, which almost touched the water—whose black bulk seemed to speed uphill and away. On the windward side, those who succeeded in opening their cabin doors against the wind and stepping out, were confronted by a steeply rising deck down which a howling, spray-filled blast hurled them, drenched, into their rooms again. But their troubles had just begun. When the *Valencia* was brought into the wind those three points, she righted and then began pitching as well as rolling, going never quite so far on her beam ends as before, but giving to the landsmen—and nearly all were landsmen—an expectation of the vessel's racking to pieces, which terrorized them quite as much as had the fear of capsizing.

As soon as this hideous spiral gyration began, the *Valencia* shipped her first seas on the port quarter. They battered at the buttress of the bridge, and, dividing, swept, a raging torrent, down the vessel's length. On the port side, it broke in the windows and crashed at the cabin doors in its headlong rush to the waist and stern of the ship to pour itself back into the leeward sea.

Hard-luck Spinks and Red O'Donnell occupied a port cabin. When the window crashed under the weight of a deluge of water, Spinks, half-dressed, was clinging to the knob of the door.

"What's g-going to happen?" he asked.

O'Donnell, rather pale, was holding to the stanchion of the bunks and trying to smoke.

"How do *I* know!" he shouted back. He had to shout to be heard above the creak of the walls, the groan of the vessel, the incessant grind and crash of movables all down the line of cabins. He was staring at the broken pane.

"Close it—close the shutter," he shouted again, "or we'll be swimmin' in here."

"I can't; I'm af-fraid of the door," groaned Spinks.

"Lock it, you fool; lock it!" He drew himself uphill along the bunk edge, and the next moment—the vessel rolling downward again—lurched to the window, almost falling on Spinks in his abrupt descent. He raised the dripping shutter, but before he could get away a thunderous sea smashed it in against him. Another broke the lock of the door, and it flung open before a wall of water that bowled Spinks over and washed him under the lower bunk.

In a room a little farther aft, Tom Chenery and Steve McPherson were having troubles of their own—especially Chenery. McPherson, deathly sick, had fallen out of his bunk onto the floor and was wallowing in brine with every lift and plunge of the stricken ship. He positively refused to get into his bunk again, though Chenery urged him thereto with none-too-gentle kicks.

"What'd I want to get back fer!" he groaned. "Wouldn't you ruther be wet than have your bones broke?"

"Take a holt on the rail, can't yer?" demanded Chenery, glaring at him.

"Honest to Gawd, I can't. I'm weaker'n a cat."

"You'll drown here if that door breaks!"

"Just as leave drown here as anywhere I know," replied Steve indifferently. "I'm sick o' this, anyhow."

"Looks like we'll drown, all right," agreed Chenery, with an affectation of cheerfulness. An old sluicing slicker swathed him. His head was covered with a cloth cap, drawn tautly down. With the next rolling descent a vast sea, submerging the window, darkened the room a moment before it crashed in the glass and the half-raised shutter.

"Git up, ye damn fool!" yelled Chenery. And he raised his roommate to a sitting posture. "This won't do, Mac. We got to git outer here." He swung his old valise to the top bunk, and McPherson's bag after it. Steve, clutching the stanchion, rose slowly to his feet. Chenery mounted the washstand, and when the room reared with the next roll to starboard, he peered through the shattered window at a bare deck and a hurrying sky. Down he plunged with the room, and up loomed the spume-crested sea.

"Look out!" he warned, "g-back of the bunk."

The door crashed in—and a ton of water.

"Come on. Now I got its number," he hissed. "When she starts to raise——"

With one quick glance to see that Steve was with him, he bolted through the doorway and aft, along the upslanted deck, to the social hall. Its entrance was a heavy sliding door, intact, though its panes were broken. He jerked open the door for Steve to dive through, followed him—uphill now—and slid the door again just before a sea smote it.

The social hall was a place of pandemonium. Half the passengers of the little steamer were in it or rushing through it from the entryways of the lower tier of staterooms. Glancing at some women who were wholly distracted, but only partially dressed, Tom Chenery decided that it was no place for him, and he lurched drunkenly forward through the passageway to the bar and card room. The place was littered with broken bottles and glassware, with chairs and card tables. Some of the latter, inverted, were charging back and forth across the room with the slop of the water. Men were stumbling into the room in every sort of dripping attire, clutching articles desperately retrieved from their wrecked staterooms. Here, in the center of the ship, with solider partitions between them and the onslaught of the seas—here was what refuge seemed left them.

A mate, on widespread, stuttering legs, went angrily through, cursing into his beard. Following him, staggering down from the upper entrance, came Red O'Donnell, half leading, half dragging the pitiful figure of Hard-luck Spinks.

"Hullo, Red!" cried out Phil Buckley. "What you got?"

"I got a half-drowned rat that was——" O'Donnell steadied for a minute on the upheaving floor. Then, still holding Spinks, he fell back over him between the legs of an upturned table. He recovered his feet, but Spinks rose only to his knees and desperately clutched a table leg as if it were his last earthly dependence.

A man in his bare feet in the corner of the bar kept up a low, rapid fire of cursing, hardly listening to his friend who, gripping the bar rail for support, was telling him all about the *Valencia* in a strident voice.

"She's been condemned t'ree times," he finally shouted. "Now, she's a gonner!"

More glass above them broke, and a shower of water descended.

"How long you think she can last, partner?" asked Buckley.

"About an hour of this, I tell you," the man shouted back, "and if the —— ——thing——" His last words, or oaths, were extinguished in the noise of smothering water and breaking woodwork.

Red O'Donnell rushed to the door—which, being high at the time, he had learned was comparatively safe—and Spinks, a final terror in his face, half lifted himself to his feet. "Looks like the whole cabin house is busting up," Red yelled.

Hard-luck Spinks fell back to his knees with a deep groan inaudible in the hubbub. But when he spoke his shouted words were heard by all.

"God help me!" He clasped his hands. "God save us all!" he amended. "Remember thy helpless children."

Chenery, in the corner, was trying to steady Steve McPherson, who had succumbed again. He scowled down—then up!—at the miserable figure of the praying man. Nervous himself, fearful enough of death, the cries and shouts, the movement and confusion, the lamentations and curses—he heard and bore them all in the bedlam of this ship doomed, he supposed, for the ocean's bed. But this loud and prayerful wailing of Hard-luck Spinks was more than he could stand.

"Shut up, you!" he roared.

Spinks seemed not to hear him. On his knees in the slopping water he droned on in incoherent supplication. Chenery staggered to him.

"Cut out that catawaulin', you! What license *you* got, a-sky pilotin' in here?" He lunged forward to escape a new and very copious deluge of water from the broken skylight.

"*No* license—*none!*" he gasped. "I know what you mean. It's true. I stole the poke. It's a judgment on me, boys. God! It's a judgment on me!"

"On *you!*" cried Chenery, his face purple with anger. "You cheeky little cur! You think this here storm was mannerfactured just to punish *you!*"

"I'll give it back to you. I got it in my pocket now. I'll give it back to him, God. I've owned up; I've——"

"You've done something *great,* ain't ye—ownin' up!" interrupted Chenery hotly. "When *I* knew you done it all the time, and you *knew* I knew it, and *He* knew it. If you wasn't a-scared to meet your God, you'd a-gone on lyin' to Him about it same as you lied to me. Get off'n your knees, you low-down coward! What the hell you want to pray fer? Don't you think *He* knows why you're doin' it? Don't *He* know you're yaller—and despise ye!"

"You're right, Tom, I ain't worthy."

"I'm right, am I? *That's* what ye say. *Why don't you cuss me back,* you white-livered cur dog? Ain't ye got no sand!"

"Oh, say, Chenery," exclaimed McPherson, forgetting his seasickness, "this ain't no time——"

"Only time we'll ever get in *this* world," Chenery answered him—and, with many another there, he believed it!

"Steve's right," bawled Red O'Donnell. "This ain't no time fer quarrelin' over a poke of dust!"

"Poke o' dust be damned!" Chenery yelled back. "What gets my goat is owin' up to it *now.* Couldn't you kep' your face shut about it and gone down somethin' like a man. You dirty, cowardly whelp." He cuffed him in the face. "Git up off yer knees, I tell ye. Ye ain't fit to pray." He buffeted the man's head and face with his left, with his right. "Go down we must, and go down we will. But me and my pals'll go down fightin' the water on our feet, and stop in the cool slime under the sea. But *you,* you squirmin' lizard, you'll keep on goin' till you fry in hell, in spite o' all yer squint-eyed prayin'. Git off your dirty shin bones, ye' yaller dawg, *and swear* at me, like a man." Again he cuffed him in the face.

"You lemme be, Tom Chenery," shrieked Spinks, weeping.

"Why don't you fight? Where's your manhood!"

"Manhood?"

"Yes, manhood. Ain't ye got none?" Chenery's anger seemed gone, but cold contempt remained. "Can't ye fight? Who was you bred by? *What low vermin spawned yer!*"

If Chenery had been seeking a vulnerable point, he now had found it. Hard-luck Spinks rose up.

Though none too courageous, it was contrition—a passion to expiate, to mortify the flesh and the spirit that had made him suffer those buffets and insults like an abject poltroon. But the taunt of low breeding, the foul slur upon those that "spawned" him roused him from his stupor of self-mortification. He forgot himself, an unworthy Spinks, in a risen consciousness of *Spinkses.* He felt upon him the eyes of worthy forbears, of a father, of a mother, that had bred and loved him.

Straight he rose up, his drawn face working; hate and fury in his eye.

"You—you—Tom Chenery, you knew there was no more pay dirt in that claim. You robbed me first—me and mine—of the little I had. I took it back—the smallest poke. But it *was* stealing, and I had it coming—'thief,' 'cur,' yes and blows. *But only me!* Not my people. For that, I'm going to fight you."

"Good! Fine!" taunted Chenery.

"You're bigger than I am—your body is. We'll see if the rest of you is. We'll match the blood that's in us, and see what kind of people bred you and what kind bred me. 'Vermin that spawned me,' hey? For that, I'm going to kill you, Tom Chenery, if this ship stays up long enough——"

"Goin' ter beat God to it, air ye?"

"With the help of God I'm going to kill you, and we'll lie together in the slime or together go on down to hell!"

"*That's* the talk," applauded Chenery, as Hard-luck Spinks, with a shivering intake of breath, hurled his lean body upon the burly miner. "*Great!* I'll make a man o' you, yet." And he bent his body to Spink's onslaught.

"Make a man of me!" Spinks gritted, near his ear. "Why, you——"

For the first time in his life he opened upon an enemy the floodgates of malediction—yet with an economy of breath that avouched his trenchancy of purpose.

He fought—reeling to the drunken antics

of the stricken ship—with his naked fists. Stumbling, tripping, flung with his antagonist among the sloshing débris of the room, sprawled on the floor, he fought him, scrabbling with his arms and legs. Splashing, half-drowned, when the brine heaped to the roll of the vessel, he fought him first as his enemy—abuser, insulter, vilifier.

But soon, as the long-pent passion of his sniveling years of failure surged up in him, he almost forgot his personal enemy. The man Chenery became dim to him and he beat his limbs against him as the incarnate "luck" that all his life had mocked him. In the imminence of death, the cruel gibes of a world of capables had struck from the hidden flint of his pride the fires of self-assertion. The atom spirit that was his was incandescent with the passion of its human equality, and should light his way out into the dark. For the first time in his life he knew exaltation!

Conscious only that he fought, living only in the supreme meaning to his soul of that consummate vindication, what was being done to him he could not know. Whether he were fighting in the flesh a gaining or a losing battle he could not care. That he tugged and strained and struck with every conscious energy that was his—that, to the coward and weakling, was conquest, that was triumph, that was solace and peace—the solace and peace that should come before death.

In his teeth he had asked God to damn the sneering capables impersoned in the man Chenery; but in this beatitude that had come to him he knew that what he fought was not in Chenery but in himself, and in the gratitude of his triumph hate went out of him and brotherhood came in, and he murmured "Bless him!"

"Matter with this feller?"

Spinks woke up. He was lying in Tom Chenery's slicker up out of the slop, on four stools barricaded by the legs of two card tables against the diminished roll of the ship. A figure in a bedraggled blue uniform was peering at him. A shaft of sunlight streamed down upon him from the jagged skylight.

"Nothin'," said Chenery evenly. "Fagged out, that's all. Been exercisin' too hard."

The steward looked him over. There were no marks on him, to speak of. But Chenery's face was badly cut.

Spinks wondered dully that the *Valencia* should still be filled with air. He had visioned it, before—in the distracting interludes of his exaltation—as soon to be glassy with still waters, with fish mouthing at them overhead. He heard talk.

"Dick seen the first mate. He says we're laying to, now—safe—off the islands. And the glass is risin'."

Spinks looked at Chenery, standing by him, his hands in his Mackinaw. "You better take that poke. It's in my pocket."

"You lie, old sport," said Chenery amiably. "It's in the purser's safe."

Spinks struggled to go on thinking. It was a painful effort, for his will was massacred.

"How much was in it?" he asked.

"Twelve hundred and fifty dollars."

The words jerked the end of a memory chain. "That's—that's just what I paid you for that claim. Isn't that queer!"

"I'll say it *ain't!*" returned Chenery. He drew closer to the used-up man. "I weighed that out a-purpose when I heard you was goin' outside, broke. I didn't know you was goin' out on the *Sarah.*"

"You—didn't—intend to give it—to me!"

"*You!*" said Chenery with affable contempt. "Say, you think I'm locoed! You'd only give it away again—to somebody with a worked-out claim, or something just as silly. I was going to send it to your wife, in Seattle, when I got outside. The purser's got her address now. It's marked on the poke. I give him a ten-spot to deliver it to her himself."

Another story by Mr. Solomons will appear in an early issue.

Out of a Clear Sky

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "A Tale of Two Towns," "Breaking and Entering," Etc.

Everybody has at least one peculiar weakness—such as the famous general who feared cats. "Battling" Boone had a chink in his armor, too—enough of a one to enable "Sully" Horan to get ample revenge

THE Wichita Wildcat slugged fiercely with his right. "Battling" Boone stopped the blow, but he employed his solar plexus in accomplishing that feat. Then the Wichita Wildcat, as the other man lurched, drove in a wide, sweeping left hook. Mr. Boone succeeded this time in getting every part of his anatomy out of the way except the point of his jaw.

In a spiritual sense, the erstwhile redoubtable Battler promptly departed from there, although he left the pummeled form of himself huddled upon the canvas. Whereupon two gentlemen in the immediate vicinity took up mathematics in a serious way.

In the ring, a stocky man in a soft, white shirt and linen trousers demonstrated the fact that he could count from one to ten.

At the ringside "Sully" Horan mentally subtracted the sum of eighty-five dollars from eighty-five dollars and ten cents. He quickly arrived at the embarrassing result of ten cents, the thin material evidence of which he clutched in his perspiring palm as he languidly passed from the scene in the crush of outward-bound humanity. The eighty-five dollars, he reflected, nestled in the wallet of the gentleman who had officiated as stakeholder. In time, a very short time, it would be turned over to the gentleman who had generously offered Sully odds of two to one.

Battling Boone emerged from his reveries in his dressing room. He recognized the place almost at once. Mark Mergen, his manager, and "Ted" Riordan, his trainer, who was something of a doctor in such cases, worked over the Battler anxiously but patiently. Mr. Boone felt that he didn't need all these attentions, yet he was too apathetic to protest. A sponge boy flitted around the room, helping as much as he could in the resuscitation ceremonies. At first their voices sounded like preliminary tests in telephony, but gradually drew nearer. As usual with strong men like Battling Boone, he came almost back to himself with a snap.

"Did he knock me clear back here?" he inquired in dull, listless tones.

"No," replied Mark Mergen, "he didn't knock you quite this far. You was on your way and still going at the count of ten, but there was a post in the way. We lugged you back here."

A wan smile crept across the chastised face of Battling Boone.

"How long was I out?" he asked.

"Twenty minutes."

Mr. Boone meditated upon this astounding revelation.

"Twenty minutes! That's almost a through ticket, ain't it?"

"A through ticket!" sputtered Riordan, the trainer. "That's what I call a transcontinental tour. I never seen such a slumber powder as that Wildcat pelted you with! He had everything behind it except the marine corps. I'll bet you been in a lot of strange places since then, eh?"

"Yes-s-s," Battling Boone admitted, "I seen some funny sights and listened to some odd noises in the last twenty minutes."

"He started it slow," Riordan suggested. "Couldn't you see it?"

"I seen it all right," the Battler explained, "but I couldn't stir a muscle the way I wanted to. He got me first in the clambake, and I was out all over then. I was just standing up, that's all. But I started to slip in the second round, when he first clipped me in the middle and begun to hammer my head, too. I commenced to hear the birdies twitter and the sleighbells ring in that second round. I tell you, men, that Wichita boy can hit, and then some!"

"Battler," said Riordan in a softer voice, "I don't want to criticize you when you're just coming out of the ether, and——"

"Go right ahead, Ted—I'm all right now, and can stand it."

"Well, you just wouldn't train. You can

whip that boy, with an even chance at him —and now it's up to you to take up fighting as a business or quit it as a dangerous pastime."

"Ted's right!" Mark Mergen interjected. "It's a setback for all of us. We was on our way up to the title. But I don't want to kick, if I'm sure this thing won't happen again. You didn't train right, Battler, and you wouldn't train right. The Wildcat put in a month, and you put in a week. The only chance we got now is to play him for a comeback, and go after him right. I know you can whip him, with an even break in the training."

Battling Boone felt well enough to clamber to his feet. He sauntered over to a mirror and surveyed his countenance. Both of his eyes were dotted, his lips were swollen, and his face smeared with contusions. But his head, except for a dull ache, was clear. He began to prepare for the street, meditating thoughtfully.

"So I was out twenty minutes, eh?" he mused, under the shower. "D'you know, Mark," he called from amid the dripping water, "that's the first time I was ever knocked out; and it's great, ain't it?"

The manager, the trainer, and the sponge boy studied each other as though they thought the Battler still out.

"What d'you mean—great?" Riordan demanded.

"I mean it don't hurt. It's just like falling asleep—no pain to it at all. A knockout ain't near as bad as a clip that jars all over and don't finish you."

"Well," Mergen suggested, "don't get to liking 'em too much. Don't get addicted to the knock-out habit. A fighter on his way to the title can stand one, but two or three might make the fans and promoters think he dotes on knock-outs."

Battling Boone, nearly dressed, grew serious.

"Boys," he promised solemnly, "take it from me—that's the last time I'm goin to be put away, until some youngster in my old age knocks me clear through the championship belt. I promise you that. Stick to me, and I'll show you. Every fight from now on will be just the same to me as if I was in the ring with the champion. I've been careless—but no more!"

The others believed him. Riordan gave him the once over again, and a few words of caution, and departed with the sponge boy. Whereupon a decided change was discernible in the demeanor of Battling Boone and his manager.

"Tell me, Mark——"

"Sh-h-h!" cautioned the manager. "Not here."

They crept out of the clubhouse through an unfrequented passage and taxied to their hotel. They went in through a side entrance and hurried upstairs. In the privacy of Mark Mergen's room he and Battling Boone surveyed each other gleefully. They talked in hushed voices.

"Did I do it right?" asked the recent victim of knockoutitis.

"It was the best ever! I didn't think you'd take such a lacing. I was afraid you'd lose your head and tear into him. But you certainly put it over!"

"I went into that ring," the Battler boasted, "to take a beating. I had to do it. I couldn't lay down flat. I had to take all the punishment there was in the Wildcat's gloves. If that crowd got a suspicion that it was framed, it would drive me out of the ring. I fought as hard as I could without whipping that chump, and I took a real licking and a real knock-out. Once or twice I come almost letting him have it. But I held off and took everything he had. Say, Mark, when I want to, I can tame that Wildcat in two rounds!"

"That's what I know; and that's what you'll have to do after he gets his crack at the champion. Then you'll get a crack at the champion, and real money—and not have to pull any more of these stunts. I don't like it, but what're we going to do when we're broke?"

"We can't do nothing else, and——"

An interruption occurred at that point. A loud knock sounded upon the door of the adjoining room. They listened intently.

"I thought it was your door," the Battler whispered.

"No, it's the next room. Listen!"

The two rooms were arranged to serve as single rooms or as a suite, with a door, now locked, between.

Sully Horan took his ear away from the keyhole of the door between his room and the room of Mark Mergen. Anger, surprise, and despair flickered upon his face when the knock came upon the door opening into the hall. He found himself confronted by the hotel manager. The manager silently and sternly presented him with a bill for

two days' room rent. Sully Horan studied it thoughtfully.

"I'll take care of this to-morrow," he said.

"It will have to be taken care of to-night. You see, you are here with but little baggage, and our rules in such cases are pay in advance."

"But I haven't got the money right now."

"Then I shall have to ask you for the room."

There followed a minute or two of argument before Sully Horan prepared to quit the room. The manager was considerate enough to permit him to take his traveling bag.

The men in the next room heard the evicted guest close his door and walk slowly down the hall.

"Some stiff getting put out," commented Battling Boone.

They opened the door softly and peered into the hall. The disconsolate figure of Sully Horan moved slowly toward the elevator. There the evicted guest halted, and pressed the button. His face thus came in for a half view. In a moment he intuitively looked back.

Battling Boone and Mark Mergen got a square look at the face of Sully Horan, and he got a glimpse of them. They drew back like a couple of rubber bands, and closed the door. Scorn flashed from the eyes of Sully Horan in that fleeting glance, and a lasting impression of his face imprinted itself on the consciousness of Battling Boone.

"I don't like that guy's countenance," the Battler muttered.

"We should worry about a boob like him!" Mr. Mergen rejoined contemptuously.

"How d'you know he's a boob?"

"He got throwed out of this hotel, didn't he? He's just some bum tagging the fight."

"Yes—but suppose he heard us talking?"

"As long as he ain't got no witnesses, we should fret!"

The next big fight for Battling Boone was eighteen months later, and his opponent was the Wichita Wildcat. Meanwhile the pugilistic map had undergone some changes, as well as the countenance of the Wildcat. This young man's nose had been flattened and the smooth surface of his face somewhat seared with scars. These alterations had been made under the direct supervision of the champion.

Wholly unaware that he had not fairly whipped Battling Boone, the Wildcat pursued the champion until he got a match. He didn't know that he had been the victim of a lopsided betting ring, which is the technical term for a crowd of crooked gamblers that frames only one fighter in a contest.

He felt quite confident when he stepped into the ring with the champion. He possessed the comforting knowledge that he had whipped Battling Boone, a task almost as trying as whipping the champion. But he was quickly disillusioned.

The champion started his express train of wallops, hooks, jabs, and thrusts at the upper fringe of the Wildcat's belt. He ran that train clear up to the Wildcat's forehead, making all stops. He connected with every vital spot en route, and climbed out of the ring with the championship belt just as securely around his midriff as when he went in. They carried the Wildcat out.

But he was far from daunted. The Wildcat fought everything that came his way, and sometimes went out of his way. Finally he got a return match with Battling Boone, in the hope that a second victory would win him another mêlée with the champion.

The Battler wanted that fight, too. He meant to whip the Wichita Wildcat this time, and thus get his chance at the champion. The financial stringency had been overcome by his profits from the frame-up, and now he had his eyes on the championship. In his path stood the Wichita Wildcat.

Both men were confident, Battling Boone secure in the knowledge that he had permitted the Wildcat to whip him, and the Wildcat secure in the belief that he had fairly whipped the Battler. The bout was staged on the night of the Fourth of July, in the Gateway Athletic Club in Kansas City.

The first round was rather a tame affair. The process of feeling out and sifting any new tricks of the other man was satisfactory to Battling Boone. He discovered that the Wichita Wildcat was a better man than formerly, but not enough better to worry him. He could whip him. He found that the Wildcat had a freer punch, a snappier and more stinging wallop, but it wouldn't sting enough. The Wildcat found the Battler a better man, too, but he didn't lose faith.

The round was about two minutes old when they fell into a clinch. Battling Boone,

in the few moments his chin clung to his opponent's wriggling shoulder, swept his gaze over a section of upturned faces at the ringside. A great cone of light streamed over the ring. Outside that the arena was in semidarkness, but it was light enough to distinguish near-by faces.

The countenance of a man sitting in an aisle seat momentarily caught the gaze of Battling Boone. The man's eyes peered directly into his own. For just a moment he forgot that he was locked in a clinch with a squirming antagonist. Something in the concentrated squint of the spectator held him spellbound. In another instant the clinch was broken, and he was occupied exclusively by the Wichita Wildcat.

The countenance of that ringside spectator troubled Battling Boone. As he fought, it occurred to him that the face was unpleasantly familiar; just why, he couldn't recall. It was a calm face, with eyes narrowed a trifle by the man's absorbed gaze.

The bell gave him an opportunity to take another glimpse of the man, but it was no more than a glimpse. He went quickly to his corner, and at once a towel flapped the air before him and sponge water streamed over his face and shoulders. He listened abstractedly to the whispers of his manager, Mark Mergen.

"Keep a steady head," Mergen murmured. "You can get him. Don't take your eyes off him."

Soon he was fighting the second round. He didn't dare turn his eyes out of the ring, but his vision, even in the more furious mix-ups, retained a curiously clear picture of the countenance at the ringside. He couldn't recall where he had seen that face before, and that troubled him. Instinctively he felt it was not the face of a friend, or even of an indifferent acquaintance. Moreover, he felt that the man was an enemy.

But he watched his business there in the ring, for the fight was speeding up. The Wichita Wildcat, with nothing outside the ring to worry him, began to force the issue. He presented Battling Boone with an assorted bouquet of uppercuts and swings, in the petals of which he had sprinkled the deadly knock-out dust, and the Battler almost came to sniffing the fatal powder. The Battler thereupon took the Wildcat more seriously than he did the countenance at the ringside.

That second round, or the last minute of it, at least, was a blaze of furious pugilism, with never a clinch. The air was full of flailing leather, and the smackety-smack of gloves and flesh sounded like the Seventh Regiment Drum Corps going into action. The Wildcat unleashed everything he had; and Battling Boone, incensed at his opponent's temerity and his own foolishness in giving a thought to the man at the ringside, held nothing back. The round finished in a fierce give-and-take clash, with honors slightly in favor of Battling Boone. The crowd approved the whirlwind contest with roar upon roar.

As he turned toward his corner, the Battler got another glimpse of the haunting face, and he had a curious impulse to leap out of the ring and beat the man up.

But why? Who was he? Damn his eyes! Why did they always meet his own with that concentrated squint, with never a muscle of the face twitching? Didn't the stiff ever look anywhere except straight into Battling Boone's eyes? Didn't he ever look at the Wichita Wildcat or the referee or over the arena? Why did the man's eyes always peer so intently into his own?

He thought of these things during the brief spell of rest. He heard Mark Mergen's accelerated whispers but hardly distinguished the words. The towel flapping close to his face annoyed him. The sponge water tickled his flesh and blinded him. He hardly felt the refreshing gusts of air stirred by the towel nor the soothing coolness of the water.

He thrust his head over the rope, across which his good right arm was draped, and took another look at the man in an aisle seat. The fellow's eyes were turned directly into his own, in the same concentrated squint, without the quiver of a lash. He noticed then that the man's hair was gray and that his heavy jaw pushed out pugnaciously, like a threat. The exchange of glances lasted but a moment, but in that moment the identity of the man flashed into Battling Boone's consciousness.

The bell sounded, and the Battler stepped out for the third round with the knowledge that the man he somehow dreaded was the guest evicted from the hotel after his last fight with the Wichita Wildcat. He wondered again if he had heard the talk of the frame-up between Mergen and himself. He had no doubt now that he had.

But what could the stiff do? *Bam!*

The Wichita Wildcat's right glove answered the mental question of Battling Boone. The Wildcat's arm darted out straight as an exclamation point. The glove snapped against the Battler's loose jaw, and his teeth ground together with a force that made them ache. His head swayed momentarily, but, finished boxer that he was, he covered nicely, shifted adroitly until his senses came fully out of the haze, and began to fight. The maneuvering of Battling Boone in that crisis drew a cheer from the arena. The Wichita Wildcat began to realize fully what a wonderful boxer he had before him. For the first time, doubt crept into his mind.

But Battling Boone had an answer to the question he had propounded inwardly: "What could the stiff do?" The "stiff" at the ringside could make him lose that fight if he permitted his thoughts to wander from the ring. The crack on his loose jaw proved that. How did he happen to let his jaw sag like that? How did he happen even to let the Wildcat hit him so cleanly in such a vital spot? Because the man at the ringside claimed his attention.

Battling Boone fought. There was to be no more nonsense. As though to prove it, he smacked the Wildcat on the nose with a stinging back-hander, followed with a rousing left to the jaw. Then he stood off and grinned tauntingly.

"See how easy it is!" he buzzed into the Wildcat's ear when they fell into a clinch a moment later.

In that clinch Battling Boone again met the steady gaze of the hated spectator, and again he suffered a qualm. In another moment he was fighting, but not with all his dash. The image of that face would not fade from his vision, and he had the decidedly uncomfortable sensation of being a marked man. Conspiracy lurked in the spectator's face.

How silly that was! What conspiracy could harm him in that ring? Nobody could give the Wichita Wildcat power to whip Battling Boone, if Battling Boone didn't want to be whipped—if he fought. That was it; if he fought. Well, he would fight.

Around and around and over the ring they went, Battling Boone on the offensive. It was a contest between a heavy hitter, the Wichita Wildcat, and a superb boxer, Battling Boone. The Wildcat had a knock-out under each shoulder blade, if he could link it up properly with a vital spot, but Battling Boone ordinarily was too clever for him. The Battler's game was to outbox the Wildcat, wear and peck him down, and then knock him out with a furious, smothering volley.

The bell at the end of the third round found them in another clinch. Over the Wildcat's shoulder Battling Boone peered into the crowd. The man with the concentrated gaze had departed. His seat was empty. As the bell unloosened the clinch, the Battler looked again, as though he doubted his vision. But his vision was accurate. The man really had gone. The empty seat, curiously, appalled him.

"What's the matter with you?" Mark Mergen muttered when the Battler moved swiftly into his corner. "You ain't yourself. You fight as if you was doped. You got to be on your toes every second, Battler, or that boy will toss in a hard one. He's the boy that can do it, if you give him a chance. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"I'm all right!" The Battler spat the words out of the corner of his mouth. "Let me alone"—impatiently—"I'm all right!"

But he wasn't all right. He came up for the fourth round, with his mind intent on the disappearance of the man he now felt to be a Nemesis. Strangely, the man's absence affected him more deeply than his presence. What was he up to?

They fought. Time after time the Wichita Wildcat almost got home the slumber poke, but the Battler managed to save himself. The crowd yelled "Fight!" Derisive hoots mingled with the shouts. They tore into each other fiercely.

At the middle of the fourth round the elements got busy. Thunder rumbled in the heavens and lightning flashed across the summer night.

There were windows along only one side of the Gateway A C.'s gymnasium, in which the arena was built. The great room, dim except for the cone of light streaming over the ring, was searched momentarily by flares of lightning. Rows of faces were thrown into spectral relief, only to be as quickly extinguished.

At the first ominous rumble of thunder, Battling Boone winced. As the lightning flickered he closed his eyes for an instant, and a shudder, almost imperceptible, passed over his frame. They fought on. After a

few seconds another peal of thunder and play of lightning slowed down the fast-going Battler. Whereupon a revelation came to the Wichita Wildcat.

Battling Boone was afraid of lightning!

Another blast from the heavens and a stroke of lightning so vivid that it seemed to crackle and sputter, left no doubt in the mind of the Wichita Wildcat. Battling Boone, afraid of nothing that walked or crawled upon the earth, nevertheless had an inherent fear of lightning that would follow him to his grave.

Battling Boone, steel himself as he might, could not help closing his eyes when the sky flashed. No matter how intensely he fought, the lightning slowed him down momentarily. Those fleeting slow-ups were sufficient for the purposes of the Wichita Wildcat.

Just before the bell at the end of the fourth round, thunder boomed again and lightning streaked the sky. A moment later Battling Boone lay on the floor. He wasn't out, but before he could get to his feet the bell rang. Mark Mergen, pale and almost in tears, made a last appeal as the Battler sat in his corner.

"Please, please, Battler," he pleaded, "don't pay no attention to the storm! It ain't going to hit you—that lightning ain't! Just don't notice it. Why, the crowd will think you're yellow—and that's our finish! Don't mind the lightning, Battler, boy!"

"I can't help it—and you know I can't help it," the Battler muttered. "This has been one fine night—with that stiff at the ringside, and now this storm!"

"What stiff at the ringside?"

"Oh, nobody."

The fifth round and the storm. The gymnasium danced into light and into shadow under the wavering pyrotechnics of the heavens, and thunder reverberated across the skies. Blow after blow fell upon the wincing form of Battling Boone. He held up until near the end of the round. A crushing hook to his jaw followed a long, quavering sparkle of lightning. The Battler spun on his heels, a silly grin spread over his bruised face, and he slumped to the floor. The fight was over ten seconds later.

Battling Boone and his disconsolate manager left the clubhouse an hour later. In the street, they observed that stars twinkled in the sky. The rain heralded by the thunder and lightning had not fallen. The storm had blown over.

The next afternoon Battling Boone and Mark Mergen, at their hotel, had a visitor. Battling Boone restrained himself. He decided not to slay the man until he heard what he had to say.

"My name," said the visitor, "is Horan —John Sullivan Horan. I'm known in most places as Sully Horan, and I've been a follower of sporting events for many years now. I thought maybe you fellows would like to hear a little history."

"Is this the guy that worried you from the ringside?" Mark Mergen asked of Battling Boone.

"He's the stiff!"

"Yes," Sully cut in, "I'm the stiff that worried him from the ringside, and it don't give me no grief to find out from Battling Boone himself that I worried him. Now, listen, men, I have an idea that Battling Boone can whip me—especially as it's a clear day—and maybe he's figuring on doing it, but——"

"I'll say I'm going to do it!" the Battler assured him.

"That's up to you. That will give me a chance to get into the newspapers with my story. Now, do you want to hear the story first?"

The fighter and his manager studied each other.

"Tell it!" Battling Boone urged abruptly.

"Have a chair," Mergen urged, in a softer voice.

"No, thanks; I'll stand up," Sully Horan rejoined. He smiled upon his hosts. "A few months ago," he began, "about eighteen months, to be exact, Battling Boone fought the Wichita Wildcat. I was an admirer of Battling Boone, and I went over to that fight and bet every cent I had on him. Battling Boone lost the fight and I lost my money. That was all very well. It wasn't the first money I'd lost on prize fighters and race horses and other fickle things. In my room in a hotel I heard you two men talking. I found out that the fight was a frame-up—that Battling Boone was crooked. Pretty soon I got throwed out of the hotel, because I couldn't pay my bill. Maybe you remember all that.

"I hate to be robbed, especially in the middle of the winter. It's also inconvenient to be robbed two hundred miles from home. That's where it was, as you very well know, two hundred miles from this town of Kansas City, according to the map. But by actual

measurements taken by myself, it's closer to a thousand.

"Well, do you know that I was throwed off every freight train, and chased by every dog, and fanned by every cold wind, and scolded by every constable, and pelted by every snowflake between that town and Kansas City? I slept in everything along the route but a bed, and had everything to eat except food. It was only natural that I should turn the picture of Battling Boone toward the wall.

"When I got back here,I had a tough time getting a job, but finally I got one—the job I'm holding down now. I'm the manager of the bowling alleys at the Gateway A. C.

"For several months I've been watching Battling Boone—studying him. You needn't be surprised, Battler. You've been fighting around town, and knocking 'em dead, in a lot of second-class clubs, and worse, waiting for another chance at the Wichita Wildcat. I saw all your fights. I was looking for a weak spot in your make-up. Finally I found the only weak spot you got—and I was disappointed, as I didn't see where that would help me get back at you.

"In one of your fights, when you was in the ring, they took two or three flash lights. Every time that gun of the photographer puffed and flared, you shivered and turned pale. I noticed that. Later I found out that you was afraid of lightning—that you had been all your life, and I knew you always would be. I got that dope straight from your own crowd, I ain't saying how—but I got it!

"Well, as I say, that information didn't appear to be any good to me. I didn't know how I was going to get back at you, and I just about give it up. It wasn't on my own account that I wanted to set you back—it was on account of the fighting game in general, and all the men that bet on you in that framed fight. You had it coming to you.

"My spirits revived when you and the Wichita Wildcat signed up to fight at the Gateway A. C., where I work. It looked as if things had begun to come my way—but I didn't see just how. But about three or four days before the Fourth of July I got an idea—and I'm glad to say that I set you back. The public don't know it was the lightning you was afraid of, and that I got you nervous by looking you straight in the eye from the ringside. They don't know that. They think you're afraid of the Wichita Wildcat. They think you're yellow—and you'll have a hard time getting a decent fight from now on; let alone a crack at the championship. Yes, men, I certainly got Battling Boone's goat by looking him straight in the eye from the ringside. He knew who I was!"

"Why, you poor stiff!" Battling Boone sputtered. "That wasn't what upset me. It was the lightning—now that you know so much! It was the lightning!"

"Score another for Sully Horan," that gentleman rejoined easily.

"What d'you mean?" Mark Mergen demanded. "Are you trying to make us think you can bring on thunder and lightning any time you want to?"

"Yes," Sully assured them; "that kind of thunder and lightning. Listen, two days before the Fourth of July I bought twenty dollars' worth of fireworks—skyrockets, roman candles, pinwheels, nigger chasers, and them things. The bowling alleys of the club are right above the gymnasium. I'm the manager of the bowling alleys. The fight was in the gymnasium. At the end of the third round I saw the Battler was nervous from looking me in the eye. I figured it was time for the storm to come up.

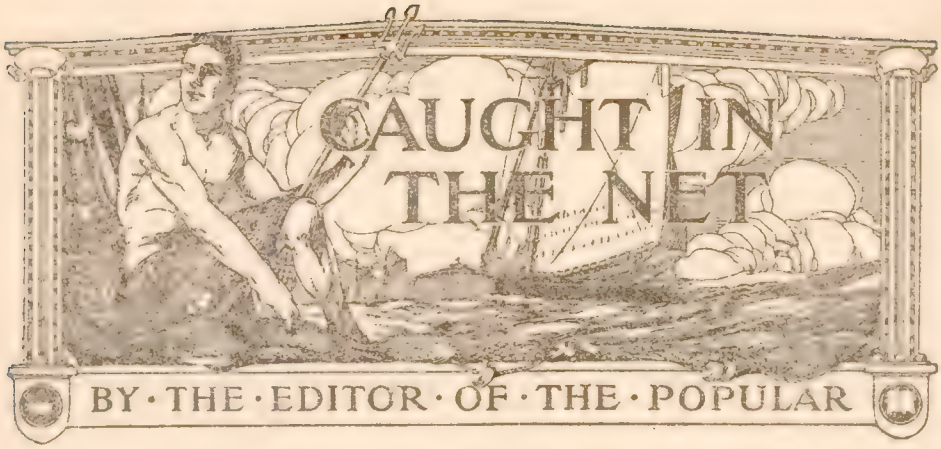
"I slid away and went upstairs. I had a boy working on every one of the twelve alleys. There wasn't any pins, and the balls rumbled down and off into the pits, just like thunder rolling away. Sometimes they started only two or three balls at a time, but when I signaled they sent a ball roaring down every alley—and it was some peal of thunder!

"That was the thunder department. The lightning department was over by the windows, and I managed that in particular. A couple of kids helped me, and we sent a string of skyrockets, roman candles, pinwheels, and nigger chasers down by the windows of the arena. They flared and crackled, and I expect you thought it was some storm!

"But Battler, I didn't expect you to give out so quick. I'd only used about half the fireworks when the shouts of the crowd told me you'd hit the canvas for ten full seconds.

"And I'm glad to do what I can to help drive a crooked fighter out of the game!"

Before Battling Boone and Mark Mergen recovered the power of coherent speech and decisive action, Sully Horan had departed.



THE OPPOSITION TO PROGRESS

THE august members of the British Parliament at one time listened to the arguments presented on behalf of George Stephenson's application for the right to run the first steam railway in the world. Then, as an absolute proof of his folly, he was asked: "What would happen if a cow got in the way of your engine?" Of course, to the conservative minds of the British M. P.'s a vision appeared of a train overthrown with the loss of human lives. But Stephenson calmly replied: "It would be bad for the cow."

In the Carnegie Committee report on the metric system, this little story is told to illustrate the opposition that arises whenever any new idea is proposed. Both in this country and in Great Britain the same opposition is ranged to-day against the adoption of the metric system of weights and measures, the invention of James Watt, who made possible the steam engine, and for whom the unit of electric power is named.

In 1786 the United States, at the suggestion of Thomas Jefferson, adopted the decimal system of currency, with the dollar as the unit of value, but Congress failed to approve his other suggestion—that Watt's simple decimal system of weights and measures be substituted for the antiquated and varied units then—and still—in use.

Watt's system consists of meters, liters, and grams. A meter is approximately one ten-millionth part of the distance from the equator to the pole, measured on a meridian of the earth. It is equivalent to 39.37 inches. The absolute meter is the distance between two lines on a certain platinum bar, kept at the rooms of the International Metric Commission in Paris, when this bar is at the temperature indicated on a thermometer as "freezing." A liter is the volume of a cube the edge of which is one-tenth of a meter. A gram is the approximate weight of a cubic centimeter of distilled water weighed in a vacuum, at the temperature of its greatest density, four degrees centigrade. It is equal to 15.43 troy grains. The absolute gram is a thousandth part of the standard kilogram preserved in Paris, with the International Metric Commission. The decimal divisions of these primary units are designated by the Latin prefixes deci, centi, and milli; the decimal multiples by the Greek prefixes deca, hecto, kilo. Thus, a decimeter is one-tenth of a meter, while a decameter equals ten meters. A meter is about ten per cent longer than a yard; five hundred grams is about ten per cent more than the pound avoirdupois; the liter is five per cent larger than the United States liquid quart.

Every great nation of the world has adopted this plan except England and the United States, but then England still holds to her awkward currency system of pounds, shillings, and pence, from which this country shook itself free in 1786. No one questions the advantage of the decimal currency system, so that the clinging to the old units of weights and measures is hard to understand.

William G. McAdoo, former secretary of the treasury, and director of the railroads, said: "A very important thing is the adoption of the metric system. It was a most

unhappy event that the metric system was defeated when it came up here—a monumental mistake. If taken up seriously and applied intelligently, we could effect the transformation in a few years, and it would do more for the development of trade than anything ever yet attempted."

BASEBALL

EVERYBODY likes to read a good baseball story. We like to print them. They reflect an important part of our national life. For baseball is more than just a game. It is an American institution, and one of considerable moral value to the community. Besides giving needed exercise, the game's demand for "team play" and healthful self-subordination for the attainment of a common end encourages in our youth the development of that self-discipline of the individual necessary for the general good. By the same token, while the playing of the game oneself is infinitely better, the mere watching of it, as played by experts exemplifying this virtue of self-control and its concomitant qualities of quick judgment and self-confidence, is calculated to nourish respect for these virtues. Herein is a great outstanding benefit inherent in our professional exhibitions.

Back of all this though, it goes without saying, must be faith in the integrity of the professional game as played before its legions of spectators. There is little "moral uplift" of any sort to be gained from watching a game one knows to be "crooked." Wherefore the recent indictment of a dozen professional players for bribe-taking in the 1919 world series games, was a matter of serious importance to thousands more than the players and club owners in question. It hit at an institution of moral value to the community in general. Losing faith in the honesty of organized baseball would be losing the benefit of a wholesome annual mental tonic.

Regarding this scandal of the dozen indicted players, however, it is a relief to know that the Chicago grand jury investigating the matter has returned an encouraging report. For, while—to quote the report, "evidence has been found that some games were thrown by players, the practice was not general and the leaders in organized baseball may be relied upon to keep the game above suspicion." After all, this was no more than we expected would be found to be the case, but it is pleasant to be so definitely reassured. As a matter of fact, the grand jury even found cases where players had immediately reported to their managers bribes proffered for "fixing" games, and likewise cases of managers who had at once discontinued players implicated in attempts to corrupt the game. Incidentally, the jury found it advisable to emphasize in their reports the remorse and self-contempt felt by the bribe-taking players appearing before them. This in itself is significant. If even in these backsliders there is an underlying real sense of having, as public-paid performers, occupied positions of trust to which they should have been faithful, we surely need have no fears of the vast majority of other professional players not maintaining the proper spirit toward their work, nor of the game's having lost any of its high estate.

This being so, the ancient and honorable "Winter League," now in full session, can look forward to the coming season with all the old gusto, and we can continue to give you tales of the organized national game with all the old assurance of still affording you real pictures of one of the best parts of American life.

A HOPEFUL MESSAGE

PEOPLE no longer dread tuberculosis as equivalent to a death sentence, because the public has come to understand the disease and how it can be cured. The effort is now being made to have intelligent people likewise understand certain elementary facts about cancer. Probably because surgical and every other form of treatment is seen to fail in case after case, there has been created around this latter disease an atmosphere of despair which is hard to overcome and which is not warranted by the facts. The truth is that cancer like tuberculosis, if discovered early, is entirely curable. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that it is at first a small local growth and is practically always easily removable by prompt surgical or other treatment. It must equally emphatically be borne in mind, however, that its early signs are usually painless and seem

so trivial that oversight of the danger is easy—and a delay of even a few weeks can too often change the whole prospect. Vigilance is the price of safety—vigilance and a knowledge of what the danger signals are. And if any such signals do materialize, insist at once on a thorough examination by a competent physician—avoiding all quacks and their panaceas as the plague. There is no medicine that can cure cancer. Even X-ray treatment should be resorted to only in large and reputable hospitals or at the hands of physicians of unimpeachable standing.

Cancer, of course, is the lawless growth into an increasing malignant mass of those physiological "cells" composing the tissues of the body—a growth which, if not removed, penetrates in time into surrounding tissue. It is commonly said that we do not know just what does make any given group of these "cells" take on this extraordinary power of uncontrollable abnormal growth. But far more is known than most people realize about the conditions which seem to favor this malignant change. We know that various small lumps, lacerations, and ulcers which do not heal, and warts, moles, and birthmarks which change in size and color, may possibly turn into cancer, usually through constant irritation, unless promptly treated. Incidentally, the growth rarely results from any sudden injury.

Cancer of the tongue, for instance, is frequently traceable to continued irritation of a sore from badly fitting dental plates or the sharp edges of decayed teeth; cancer of the lip has been known to come from unceasingly irritated and unhealed burns from pipe stems. As for other various signs of possible cancer, which cannot be touched on within our limited space, it would be most wise for any one to consult such an authoritative pamphlet on the subject as that of the United States Public Health Service in its "Keep Well Series," issued by the treasury department.

In a true sense, quick recognition of these precancerous conditions may really prevent the disease. Here, as always, the ounce of prevention is preferable to the pound of cure. Persistent ulcerations, sores, growing warts, et cetera, should be immediately eliminated by a competent physician or surgeon, thereby greatly reducing the probability of the disease.

In conclusion, it is well to realize that cancer, as far as is known, is not contagious, nor is it a blood disease to be thought of as similar to venereal troubles. And, in spite of the result of certain inbreeding experiments with mice, under highly artificial conditions widely different from those occurring in the human race, cancer is, practically speaking, not hereditary. Life insurance companies have conclusively established the fact that there is practically no occasion for apprehension even in cases where both parents have died of the disease.

THE DISAPPEARING SNEER

IN many plays and romantic stories of the past the villain or cynic of the tale was often described as sneering at those with whom he might have a quarrel. He replied with a sneer when apparently defeated in argument or dominated by ill will, but hesitating as to a physical encounter with an antagonist. In vivid descriptions the man who sneered, whose lip curled in scorn, was often in evidence.

At the present time the word "sneer" is not so often used, but it is still used occasionally. Recently, for instance, during the trial of a defendant on the charge of criminal anarchy in one of our cities, a man in the auditorium, out on bail, pending an appeal from a sentence against him in a Federal court on the charge of violating the Espionage Act, was accused by the presiding justice of sneering when the district attorney was reading a document to the jury. The man, who denied that he was sneering, admitted that he could not help smiling at some of the district attorney's remarks and was ordered to leave the courtroom, which he did.

A sneer, it is recognized by those who have a fair acquaintance with the study of animal and human physiology, is a rudimentary snarl. When fighting animals are a little afraid of their antagonists they snarl. They show their teeth, baring their canines, with a growl. If two dogs are fighting and one does not want to fight any longer, he backs up against a wall or anything else near and snarls.

Away back in the dim past, primitive man and his immediate progenitors had canines

that were far from rudimentary, the latter being used in physical encounters. Then primitive man snarled when he was afraid and full of antagonism. As primitive man evolved to his present high estate, the canines, like some internal organs of the body, became rudimentary from disuse and the snarl was modified and became a sneer, usually in the form of a curl of the lip or a baring of the teeth, accompanied with contemptuous remarks. Sneering is not as common now as it has been, possibly because advancing civilization is hastening man's further evolution. When boys are fighting and one enters into the dispute, but is afraid to fight, his lip sometimes curls into a sneer while he makes sarcastic remarks, as the safest thing for him to do. Among uncultured men engaged in a furious argument, at times, those who are outtalked often retaliate by sneering.

In times past the sneer was occasionally in evidence at public debates when a speaker's argument was demolished and the latter was on the defensive. Sneering, however, is becoming unpopular. As human knowledge and civilization advance we more and more realize that it is a poor compensation for defeat, either verbal or physical, and is often looked on as an unconscious and unnecessary confession of defeat.

POPULAR TOPICS

SINCE the Panama Canal was opened to the world's commerce in 1914, to June 30th last, 10,212 commercial vessels passed through it. The total cost of operation has been $36,657,766—$2,231,091 more than the revenue. A profit of over two million dollars would have been earned were it not for a recent change in the rules of measurement of ships using the canal.

KEEPING the watch on the Rhine—the one maintained by the American army of occupation—is costing Germany over two million dollars a month. Up to June 30th last, the cost of this force, which Germany must pay, was $257,065,034. Of this amount $34,000,000 has been liquidated, leaving approximately $222,000,000 due the United States. On October 7th last, there were 14,534 American soldiers on duty in Germany.

TOKYO has a new sort of vehicle, the "Jinricmobile," or motor Kurumaya. It is a ricksha body equipped with a small motor, and while it makes much faster time than the old man-drawn ricksha, it is still small enough for use in the narrow Japanese streets.

THERE is talk of increasing the salaries of senators and congressmen, who now receive $7,500 a year, to $10,000 or $12,500. A five-thousand-dollar increase to each of the 531 members of the Senate and House would cost us $2,655,000 a year.

FRENCH exports for the ten months ended October 31st last totaled 18,890,263,000 francs, an increase of 11,157,113,000 francs over the same period of 1919. Imports for the ten months were valued at 29,784,516,000 francs, an increase of 2,386,746,000 francs over last year.

THE Union of South Africa is going to spend $165,000 to "tell the world," this amount having been set aside to be spent for advertising to attract tourist travel, and to make known South Africa's farming, mining, manufacturing, and general industrial possibilities.

AN English barber has calculated that it takes an average of two hundred razor strokes to give a patron of his shop a clean shave.

THE world's stock of wheat, on hand November 1st last, was 214,569,000 bushels, 2,543,000 bushels less than the stock of November 1, 1919. The United States' stock was 85,978,000 bushels, as against 163,093,000 bushels last year.

THE largest grain farm in the world is the Cameron Ranch, owned by the Noble Foundation, in Canada. The farm's crop this year is valued at over a million dollars.

EGGS have become an important item of our exports. For the year ended June 30, last, we sent abroad 38,326,968 dozen, valued at $19,149,536. The figures for 1918 were 18,969,167 dozen, valued at $7,167,134. Our yearly production of eggs is figured at 1,590,000,000 dozen, worth over $306,000,000.

CONSIDERED from the standpoint of student enrollment the five leading American universities are: New York University, 11,237; University of California, 9,435; University of Michigan, 8,255; Columbia University, 8,069; University of Illinois, 8,052.

LOOKS as if the Monroe Doctrine is going to cost Uncle Sam some money. England and France, it is reported, are preparing claims of about one hundred million dollars each against us, for damages to property of their nationals during Mexico's years of disturbance. Our government assumed this property liability on condition that European powers would maintain a policy of "hands off" Latin-American affairs.

TO win the national typewriting championship recently, George L. Hossfeld, of Philadelphia, had to write an average of one hundred and thirty-one words a minute for an hour. Second place was won by an ex-champion, Miss Owen, who averaged one hundred and twenty-eight words a minute.

THE international institute of agriculture reports that this year's aggregate wheat and rye crops of the northern hemisphere total 62,400,000 metric tons, as against 61,700,000 metric tons in 1919. The production of barley was eight per cent greater than last year, and the production of oats twenty-one per cent greater.

AN Australian soldier recently presented himself at the treasury in Melbourne, remarking that he was a hundred-dollar note, and that he would like to be cashed. In one of the battles of the war he had swallowed the note, rather than have it fall into the hands of the Germans, by whom he expected to be captured. He remembered its number, and as it happened to be the only note missing from an issue that had been recalled, the soldier was able to "cash" himself.

FOR the convenience and protection of deaf people, a Dutch society has devised a distinctive button to be worn by those afflicted. It bears the letters "S" and "H," the first letters of Dutch words meaning "bad hearing."

BEFORE the war, Japan ranked sixth among the world powers in the number of her merchant vessels. Last year she ranked third, being surpassed only by Great Britain and the United States. The Union of Japanese shipowners has recently been formed, including one hundred and one companies with seven hundred and thirty-four vessels aggregating two million one hundred and seventy-five thousand eight hundred and forty-seven tons. Two generations ago Japan had no merchant marine.

The Sell-Out

By W. R. Hoefer

Author of "A Modern Knight," "Ivory," Etc.

A hard life had made Joe Santro, ring champion, a hard man. Yet when he sold his featherweight crown it was for the lowest price on record

LITTLE Santro was through. The blasé fight crowd, in Tuxedo and sweater, from ringside to rafter knew it. Haley, the pudgy referee, edging slowly around the two boxers, knew it, as they writhed and twisted, arm locked in a squirming, jerking clinch over near the ropes in the south corner of the ring. Eddie Fitzgibbons, his even teeth gleaming milky-hued in the blaze of the big, overhead ring lights, knew it, as he flashed his sardonic victory grin over his tired opponent's shoulder into the dim audience beyond.

And little Santro, of course, knew it. *He* had known it for some time. Known it before the keen-eyed Haley, even, who had thought of stopping the gore-tinged, unequal affair after the fourth knockdown about the middle of the round.

There never had been a chance for the Santro boy from the first gong. He had known that, too, before he left his cold dressing room. He had sensed it by the way he felt as he pulled off his ragged trousers, and by the way he had shivered as he drew on his thin, flappy fighting trunks. He had glanced longingly in the direction of the big, heated dressing room, with the rubbing tables, as he entered the building that evening with his brother Joe—the clever, wonderful Joe, whom the fans would see in his ring début next week and who would show them that a Santro could be more than a pork-and-bean fighter. But Joe had merely grinned at the glance.

That dressing room at the Hurricane Club was for the boys with real class, the stars, the wind-up boys, the champions, whom the crowd always cheered and whom little Santro always envied. But, of course, he was only a prelim kid, and a bantam at that. He should be thankful that big Gus Kramer, the manager, who had "Kid" Bartel, the middleweight and a real star, in his stable, bothered with a prelim kid like him.

Still, he had felt that if he could only have gotten into the warm dressing room for a little while and thawed out the shivers, he might have a chance with Eddie Fitzgibbons, who was also only a prelim kid, although a good one. But perhaps not. Santro felt hungry as well as cold. He and Joe usually did feel that way in the winter; but, of course, that was only proper—it was only the champions, he guessed, who always ate when they wanted to.

These thoughts had been in his mind before the bout, while he was dressing and later, as he walked down the aisle, past the buzzing, murmuring fight fans. Now, however, there was but one thought in little Santro's mind as he desperately hung on the fiery, slashing Fitzgibbons with all the power of his fading stamina.

It was only a short time, a matter of only seconds, perhaps, before the gong would sound, ending this six-round preliminary. He must last until then. If not big Gus Kramer, who had been kind enough to get him bouts and take only half the fifteen dollars he usually earned in them—big Gus might fly into a rage. He might even discharge him from his stable. Perhaps, too, he would hold out on his share of the fifteen dollars for punishment. He *must* last the limit. Gus would be sore if he didn't.

Haley, the referee, tapped the tired boy's shoulder and told him to break. The boy held to his adversary's arms only the tighter. It was his sole chance to last. Then the referee, in a temper, snarled at him, and broke the two apart by physical force.

Santro crossed his arms, his gloves covering his battered face, and bent over to protect his thin body. Fitzgibbons, the battle gleam bright in his little crafty eyes, with a knock-out in sight, lunged in furiously, brushed away one protecting glove, and hooked his left glove to the other's jaw. The blow landed almost right. Santro's arms

dropped, his tired eyes became glassy looking, his mouth opened to a gasp and he crumpled to the canvas-covered ring floor. At the referee's "seven" the boy rose to unsteady legs, his scrawny arms covering his jaw instinctively. The lights above the ring seemed dimmer and the human black and white specks, off in the distance, that he knew wanted to see him knocked out, seemed very vague and blurry and far away.

He felt tired. The cut over his right eye, the puffed and almost closed left one, and the red welts on his thin body were forgotten in his present state of dim consciousness. Even his cut mouth, with the clotting blood inside that had partly gagged him from the third round on, no longer bothered him and was forgotten. He only felt that he was pretty tired and a little sleepy.

Eddie Fitzgibbons surged in wildly, missed a left for the face, and a right cross for the body, in his eagerness, and then landed with a wicked, short left hook to Santro's face. The blow seemed to arouse little Santro. It cleared his mind. The desire to sleep receded and a fear came to him. He heard a big man back of him in a ringside seat say something about a knock-out and chuckle good-naturedly.

That was it—he had almost forgotten. The knock-out! He had lost the thought temporarily. He must not be knocked out. Big Gus would be mad.

Santro raised his tired arms to ward off the furious rush of Fitzgibbons, to block, to clinch, to stall—anything, to keep Gus from becoming mad at a knock-out; he heard a distant murmur, that seemed to be growing louder to a kind of roar. The lights seemed to shake and flicker—and then they suddenly went out.

There was only a slight flutter of interest through the heterogeneous crowd as they carried Santro to his corner. The knock-out wasn't even dramatic. The result was inconsequential. It was the wind-up, with a champion the attraction, that the patient fans had come to see.

The crowd rose, stretched itself and yawned. The blasé sport writers grunted dispiritedly or grinned good-naturedly as they waited in the press seats for the next preliminary. The pudgy referee gazed out over the audience with a bored air as he leaned against a ring post, and even the telegraph instruments seemed to carry a burden of pronounced ennui in their staccato chorus as they clicked their two-line announcement of the casual affair over the wires.

"Fitzgibbons beat Santro in the first preliminary at one hundred and sixteen pounds. K. O. Six rounds," droned the telegraph instruments to a bored sport world. Once, a big, flabby-looking man did chuckle audibly as he glanced through the smoke haze at little Santro, crumpled on his stool in the corner. The scrawny, dirty, tired-looking little sixteen-year-old kid, his face a bedraggled, crimson mess, his unimpressive form drooping wearily, as a besweatered handler curtly tossed him a dirty towel, did present a rather comical sight. Again the big fat man chuckled aloud as he removed his cigar from his thick lips—but that was the only sign of interest displayed.

Back in the dressing room was where the real interest in the bout was displayed. As the beaten boxer had expected, Gus Kramer, who had been kind enough to get these bouts for him, was mad.

"Yuh yellow, little wop," thundered Gus, in righteous anger over the knock-out, "why didn't yuh stick the limit, huh? D'yuh know I had two sawbucks down on yuh to last. Yuh pulled a flop on me. Now, yuh don't get a cent for this fight from me. Not a cent," and he glared down at the comical-looking little Santro, who did really look pretty funny with his swollen features, and at the latter's brother Joe, who was standing near by.

"I couldn't help it, Gus," stammered the bantamweight boxer, gazing up at the big manager with tired, contrite eyes. "I tried to stick it out with that guy."

"Tried hell!" thundered Gus angrily. "Yuh've beat as good boys as Fitzgibbons."

"I know it," admitted the other weakly. "But I didn't feel right to-night. I felt kinda funny. I was cold, and—and—I been kinda feelin' a little sick."

"Sick," roared Gus, "I'll make yuh sick, yuh yellow little wop. Yuh will lay down on me and make me drop a twenty-case bet," and he aimed a kick at the other.

Little Santro tried unsuccessfully to dodge the kick and then sank back on his bench. He whimpered a little and glanced at his brother Joe. The latter merely gazed laconically at the big manager. Although only seventeen years old, he was a man-boy, wise in many things. He knew, for example, out of his street-learned wisdom, that anger is futile against the inevitable. A display of

it might earn another beating for his brother and a canceled bout the following week for himself. It was bad, of course, that they would receive no money—he was now feeling pretty hungry as well as his brother, but useless anger and interference wouldn't help. Joe was a philosopher.

Gus glared again at little Santro and then cuffed him savagely across the face as he thought of the lost twenty dollars. Santro again whimpered a little, somewhat like a whipped dog, and glanced at Joe. The latter merely glanced back in stoic, unaffected silence, whereat little Santro furtively dried his eyes on his dirty undershirt sleeve and proceeded to dress.

The dressing-room door had been slightly ajar and at the cuff and further angry words of Gus a man stepped in and glanced around.

"Say, cut that rough stuff out," said he to Kramer. "That kid couldn't help getting beat." At the words Joe eyed the newcomer in some surprise. He couldn't quite understand it. Friendliness, unbought by either money or effort, was a new thing in his deep experience. He gazed at the stranger in stoic interest.

"The little whelp layed down on me," replied Gus Kramer savagely. "And not a red does he get from me for a lay-down."

The other man took the situation in with a quick, keen glance. Then he turned to Gus Kramer.

"You're not going to hold out on this kid, are you? Why, they don't pay the prelim boys anything, as it is. And you get a fifty-fifty rake-off on the measly jack they win. Both these kids ought to be given a good square meal and then get tucked away in bed, by the looks of 'em."

"Why not try minding your own business for a change," snapped Kramer, viciously for answer. "I'm handling these two boys. Yuh go back and 'tend to Artie O'Hagan. He's due to go on in the semifinal pretty soon, and yuh'll have enough to do keepin' him from gettin' beat instead of fussin' over my two boys." The other, after a contemptuous glance at Kramer, turned to the two Santro youths.

"Have you kids got any money at all?" he asked.

"No," replied Joe stolidly. His brother merely sniveled a little.

The man pulled some bills from his trousers pocket, counted out five single dollar notes, and handed them to the astonished Joe.

"Here," said he brusquely, "this is for you two kids. And some advice goes with it. Get away from Kramer and get a job for yourselves. This game is only for the stars and champs—they get the gravy. All prelim kids like you'll ever get is beatings—even from your own manager," and he left the dressing room.

The stoic Joe took the money and stared in surprised puzzlement at the departing man. It was a new experience in his gloom-fringed young existence. He glanced at the money and then grinned a little, as at a joke. Something must be wrong. One usually had to fight for what little he did get in this life. In all his life nothing like this had befallen him or his brother.

The big crowd of fans outside had merely yawned at the knock-out of a few minutes ago. The referee had been bored. The newspaper boys had stretched themselves and openly yawned as they wrote their brief notices of the result. A fat man had laughed. Some had joked and others had complained because of the poor fight. There hadn't been a friendly thought for Francisco in the house. Why should there be? Friendship and applause and money and happiness—that was for the winners, the stars, the champions. Why, the man must be crazy, what they called a "sucker," to befriend them.

Again Joe grinned and looked at the money. Curiously there was no gratitude in his face and no gentleness in his grin; only mirth, as at something humorous. Some surprise and a small measure of relief was in his hard young face.

II.

It was five days later that Joe Santro fought his first professional bout. He had fought often before and always with success when the odds were anywhere near equal. But always, before, he had fought as an amateur; first in street affairs, in the congested, pulsating, smelly, noise-infested region of his home, in and about Scammel Street on the East Side; then, with real gloves he had fought in the Neighborhood Boys' Club in Henry Street near by, for the sheer pleasure of it.

In the streets he had fought for his rights and nothing else. One had to in this struggling region. And always, from the very

first, he was recognized by the neighborhood as being almost inhumanly superior as a "scrapper." They said it was his speed, his eye, his stamina, his hitting power and knack and his audacity and nerve. Later, when he became known and acclaimed by the sport world they spoke of some indefinable thing the experts called "reaction." But, whatever the reason, little Francisco Santro, who had fought professional preliminary bouts before his brother had ever thought of appearing in a real prize ring, before real boxing judges and ring-wise fight fanatics, knew that Joe, who was ten pounds bigger and a featherweight, was a wonderful boxer.

He had said so to Gus Kramer. He had said it in such colorful terms and with such enthusiastic positiveness that the skeptical Kramer listened and then acted. Kramer secured this bout for Joe at the Arco Sporting Club, up in Harlem. He expected to see a fair sort of preliminary boy in native ability, with no real experience and a raw, crude method devoid of smooth ring technique. At the most he expected to see a game, fast, crude performer who might learn.

What he did see in the little Italian's first professional bout astounded him. It astounded experienced ring followers, also, and sent Ed Tuttle, the veteran fight critic, into ecstasies of praise over the performance.

For, while his opponent was merely a preliminary boy with no pretension to class, Joe Santro displayed a furious flash of genius that was unmistakable. He won by a knockout in two rounds. The experts said he could have won in two punches. And it seemed true. The little black-eyed, swarthy-faced Santro appeared to allow the bout to go for nearly two sessions merely for the enjoyment of being within the roped arena a little longer.

From the moment that he crawled through the ropes, doffed his ragged overcoat, and sat in his corner gazing over the sparse crowd with his cool, insolent, black eyes, and smiled sardonically at his opponent across the ring, to the instant when the stocky, hard-hitting "Ruddy" Belcher was stretched on the ring floor a few minutes later, the experts somehow sensed a coming champion.

They sensed it in some mysterious manner in his very being, before he had put up his hands. They saw it later in his every movement, with every ripple of his smooth muscles as Santro flashed in and out, hitting, blocking, slipping punches with sarcastic ease, side-stepping and ducking. They guessed it from the verve and snap of his vicious, short, cruel hooks, the perfect timing of his lightninglike right hand as he brought his glove through a small opening for a perfect counter, and they knew him for a champion, and a great one, when he brought his dazzling left hand over to the bewildered Ruddy's chin with a sparkling jolt and, a fraction of a second later, followed with a slashing right cross to the body that sent Belcher clear across the ring and left him an inert, drooping form on the ring floor.

They saw a human fury in action, during the few short, brilliant, turbulent minutes of the fight, but wise old Ed Tuttle, the veteran boxing authority, who had carefully studied the boxer himself as well as the boxing, saw also a cool, crafty, resourceful, stoic personality behind the hurricane flare of physical fury.

Tuttle noted the hard, glinty sparkle of the snapping black eyes of Santro, the self-reliant lines in the swarthy face, the bold tilt of the dominating chin, and the sardonic, feelingless grin that played over the cruel, thin-lipped mouth. A champion's soul as well as a champion's physical gifts!

"Who taught *that* kid to box like that?" asked a friend next to Tuttle as young Santro walked unconcernedly to his corner, threw his ragged overcoat over his smooth-muscled, sinewy shoulders and leaped over the ropes with his brilliant teeth gleaming out in a self-confident grin.

"No one," replied old Tuttle solemnly. "You can't learn it that way. Only God Almighty can make 'em like that."

That was the last preliminary bout Joe Santro ever fought. Three weeks later he was put on in the semifinal bout at the Sportsman's Club, in Jersey City, and disposed of his opponent in a round. A month later he fought his first wind-up, winning with a knock-out in the fifth round at the Arco Club against "Rocky" Landers, a high-class lightweight; and at the end of a year he had disposed of the first of the three prominent contenders for the lightweight title.

"He's a wizard," declared Ed Tuttle, who openly prophesied that, barring accident and faulty management, the swarthy, cool, disdainful Santro would be champion in two years' time. Ed's prediction fell wide of

champion's crown. It was three years before the cocky little featherweight bore a champion's grown. It was three years before "Kid" Devine, the featherweight king, was forced into a match, over the marathon route, in risk of his title.

But long before that event occurred Devine foresaw, as did the rest of the sport world, the inescapable fact that a new ring wonder, a boxing king in the making, was flashing a brilliant trail through the featherweight ranks of fistiana and could not, indefinitely, be denied his destined heritage.

Tuttle's eulogy of Santro, published in a New York daily after the latter's first windup bout, fell upon skeptical readers, in spite of the veteran's wide repute as a ring authority. It was too early to determine, correctly, the ultimate status of so youthful and inexperienced a performer, no matter how flashy and sensational he might be, thought Sportdom. But Tuttle, a genius himself, in a peculiar way, recognized genius in the far offing when he first saw it. And with each succeeding bout Joe Santro lessened the ranks of the doubters.

"His style isn't orthodox," objected one critic. "His ring technique is unlike that of any former champion."

"He makes his own technique," responded the sage, Tuttle. And three days after the remark the new ring comet had the sport devotees by the ears as the result of his quick knock-out in the third round, of the slugging, hardy "Battling" Bowen, the second most prominent contender, in the public's opinion, for the featherweight championship.

"He can hit," conceded the scoffers then. "But can he fathom a wise, crafty, fast, scientific defense like that of 'Solly' Wortman's?" The answer was given by the flashlike Santro eight months later when he and the speedy, shifty, experienced Wortman, heretofore considered the real contender for the division throne, met at Milwaukee in an eight-round bout.

The bout was fully expected by the majority of the experts to go the limit. It would take over eight short rounds to penetrate the shifty Wortman's crafty defense. No featherweight living, not even the champion, could knock out this boy in so short a period, thought they.

"Watch," advised Tuttle. And the boxing world did.

In the fourth round the cold-blooded, always-smiling Santro leaped over the ropes unconcernedly, leaving the hitherto knock-out-proof Wortman a senseless form, beaten and shattered, upon the ring floor. The public saw the handwriting on the wall then and clamored for a match between the black-haired Santro and the division king.

It was at New Orleans, on a sizzling, burning hot August day, that the new featherweight king was crowned. For the first time in the history of the ring a contender was the favorite in the betting. For the first time in ring annals a champion crawled through the ropes the under dog in public sentiment, a wagering short-ender, a ruler bearing a crown that the consensus of expert opinion declared openly and with confidence would be knocked awry and then sent cluttering among the relics of the things that were.

Devine battled like a champion. He clutched his crown with all the brilliance of a champion; and for two rounds he looked like one, even against this new wizard of the boxing realm. He made Santro miss frequently, in the first round; he landed again and again with flashing left leads; twice he countered, after the other's leads, with his feared right cross that had settled the aspirations of opponents for years. And as he went to his corner, holding a slight edge on the round a cheer floated up from the sweltering ringside that betokened restored confidence in thousands of fight denizens.

But this confidence wasn't shared by the champion himself. He knew that he wasn't landing exactly right. The other was slipping his wicked punches just enough to take the damaging edge from them. A tilt of the chin, a swift, almost imperceptible jerk of the head, and Santro was smilingly out of danger. The champion was doing most of the leading and a good deal of scoring, but he sensed an irresistible something in that smooth-moving, constantly smiling object before him that was disconcerting.

Though he had a slight edge on the second round also, he knew that the grinning Santro hadn't opened up fully as yet. He sensed it at the few moments when each had started leads at the same time. The grinning little Italian was beating him to the punch. It meant just one thing—the so-called "reaction," talked of by the experts; that indefinable something that means one being will always beat the other to the lead

—that fine coördination of eye, brain, and muscle that feels an intent, signals it instantly, and acts immediately.

The third, fourth, and fifth rounds passed with no decided advantage. In the sixth there was a furious exchange near the ropes that had the crowd on its collective heels in a roaring frenzy. It seemed an even exchange of snapping punches, but it wasn't. Santro had landed his a fractional moment sooner and harder. The crowd thought it an even fight, but both Devine and Santro, and also old Ed Tuttle, knew it wasn't.

The king knew his crown was slipping. He felt his throne totter, almost imperceptibly at the time, but he felt it. He felt the reserve power in the little fury before him. He felt the supreme confidence, that never can be simulated in the other's constant, smiling contempt.

And in the ninth round the throne rocked and swayed and the populace yelled their "thumbs down" in a frenzied chorus, for it was at the start of this session that Santro's grin receded to a cruel, thin-lipped smile, his glinty eyes hardened still more, and he leaped in for the finish he had known was coming all along.

A sudden flurry in the center of the ring, near the end of the round, started it. A few seconds later and Devine was swaying unsteadily, vainly trying to cover up as the swift Santro with clean, sharp punches battered him about. The champion's reign was ending. The throne toppled, swayed, and then crashed down, a broken memory, in the tenth round. A swift jab, a cruel right hook, a left to the body, and a swinging right to the jaw, each blow sent in so fast that the crowd could hardly follow the action, and a beaten champion was crumpled upon the ring floor with a fickle populace madly hailing a new ruler.

That evening Joe Santro received word that little Santro, his bantamweight brother, had died in New York of consumption. The telegram was handed to him by Tommy Keith, his manager, the former manager Gus Kramer having been discarded long since.

Keith looked sympathetically at Santro as the latter read the message.

"It's too bad," he said quietly, his eyes filling, "that Frankie couldn't have known you'd be champion to-night. He died just before the fight started. The message was delayed;" and he glanced again anxiously at the new champion, ready with sympathy at the expected signs of grief.

"Yeah, it's too bad," said Santro, the hard glint in his eyes unchanged as he laconically pocketed the telegram. "We can't get a train for New York for two hours. Let's go and eat."

Three days later, when they buried Santro, the "pork-and-beaner," Santro, the champion, stood silently by. He stood dry-eyed, hard-faced, and sardonic looking, a champion in the first flush of his glory, gazing at the drab end of another's brief, gray career. What feeling was shown was displayed by Tommy Keith, his manager, whose misty eyes matched the seeping drizzle from the dull sky. The sun broke through just as the two were leaving the place after the ceremony and Keith mumbled something, half to himself.

"What's that?" asked Santro.

"The sun's shining now," repeated the other, as he gazed off into distance. "Sun for the champs and rain for the prelim guys," added Tommy musingly.

"Yeah, that's right," responded Joe indifferently.

III.

Three years after he became featherweight champion Joe Santro married Aileen Tracey. When he first met her, long before, near a movie house in Ninth Avenue, a bout with Dan Cupid had seemed as far from his expectations as a boxing throne had seemed even in his maddest dreams.

He had admired her tremendously then, had gazed upon her bright beauty, her pretty, piquant, laughing features, her trim, graceful little figure, and the heavy mass of dark hair that glinted and shone in the glare of the movie lights, and he had known in that instant that he wanted her.

But he had merely grinned at the thought then. Pretty girls, as well as plenty to eat and new overcoats in winter—they were for the stars; and he was then only an unknown amateur whom referees snarled at in the ring, when he could get chances, and whom fat, stodgy, comfortable-looking men near his corner laughed at from the ringside.

But with champions it was different. Tommy Keith had truly said that the sunshine was for the champions. And he was now just that, with the bright glow of pub-

lic adulation full upon him. For he was a real champion, a great one, and one whom many wise critics declared would never be beaten while he still held a semblance of youth.

For five years Santro held such undisputed sway over his division that the public shook its collective head in wonderment. His cleverness was mystifying, his speed amazing, his attack irresistible, and his hitting cruelly destructive. And his wife's adoring pride in his supremacy was the most astonishing thing of all. She had never seen him box—had never been able to bring herself within sight of Santro's ring activities. But his dominance, his supremacy in his profession seemed an almost engulfing thing of pride with her.

"He'll have to move up and take on McKeever, the lightweight champ, to get a real fight," declared old Ed Tuttle, when the featherweight field appeared devoid of real contests for Santro; and so it seemed. But with Santro's very next bout something occurred that caused murmurings and charges in the sport world.

Hitherto the swarthy little miracle had been knocking out opponents in short order —good ones, of real class. Then "Doughey" Kelley, an aggressive, hard-hitting youth, went the limit of ten rounds with the champion. The affair caused a trifle of talk but was passed by with the comment that Santro may have injured a hand, and was careful.

Two months later another boxer stayed the limit of eight rounds, and then a third, a rugged, but hardly more than a second-class boxer, lasted the entire route of a ten-round bout in Boston. Santro had shown all of his known skill in these encounters; his blocking, his footwork, his marvelous slipping of punches were as much in evidence as ever, but he hadn't finished his opponents with his known knock-out ability.

The public began to complain; the sport writers became sarcastic.

"I thought we had a real champion at last," growled Ed Tuttle, to another scribe after a bout in which Santro had smilingly outclassed his opponent but hadn't knocked him out, "but I see he's just another one of these birds who saves up his set-ups for return bouts."

"He could have sent that Haley kid kicking any round he wanted to," averred the other. "Maybe he's letting 'em stay for the betting."

"He's stalling and tin canning," cried the public. "They oughtn't to let him get away with that raw stuff." And then the boxing commission of the State of Ohio acted. Santro was called before them, after a bout in which he had alternately shown brilliant flashes of form and then stalled with his opponent, refusing to go in for a decisive finish and laughing and joking derisively in response to the angry cries of the crowd to go in and finish his opponent. The boxing commission suspended the champion for the period of one year from bouts in the State.

In answer to the accusation Santro merely smiled good-humoredly, pleaded poor condition, and obtained matches in other States. He knocked out his next adversary in the sixth round in a Colorado bout—a tough but mediocre youth, but put up three more unsatisfactory fights in succession after that.

Tuttle led the press attack upon the smiling, brilliant, derisive champion then. He insisted that Santro be barred from every State in which his stalling tactics were pursued. Other writers took up the cry and with the press and public on the alert for questionable tactics in the ring the various boxing clubs and commissions about the country became watchful.

Soon word went forth that the champion was barred from Wisconsin for six months, following an unsatisfactory exhibition. He showed to excellent advantage after that, beating two featherweights, one in New Orleans and another in New Haven, in quick order, and the public became partly pacified. But another ordinary showing in Massachusetts caused a fight club there to bar him for a year.

"He's so good he'll run out of available opponents, if he fights on the level," said a well-known referee. "So he's letting some of these boobs stay, and even fight him pretty even, for the return matches." For two years this continued. Santro was being barred from clubs and by boxing commissions in various parts of the country, and an unsavory reputation was attaching itself to his name.

The words crook and staller and faker and "sure-thing artist" were being applied to him. To all of these accusations the little champion made no adequate reply. It was universally understood that he was totally unable to. He protested mildly at the sus-

pensions. He lamely asserted that he was making as good fights as possible, but no one believed him. He merely smiled at the public charges of faking and grinned sarcastically at the ringside crowds when a public outcry was raised at his holding, dancing tactics in bouts. At the flat charges that he was openly faking matches and winning bets on opponents staying the limit he merely smiled in quiet derision.

And then his wife, stung and hurt by the accusations, pleaded with him.

"Joe," said she one evening in their cozy uptown apartment in New York, "you know what every one's saying about you."

"Sure," said he good-humoredly.

"They say you're not trying; that you're 'pulling' your fights. They say you won't even sign up for decision matches."

"Why should I," he asked, "when I can get the coin in these no-decision things they got now. It's soft coin. All I gotta do is hold these birds safe and shade 'em a little. I'm champ. They'll pay to see me in any kind of fight."

She placed a caressing hand on his arm. "Joe, dear, I used to be so proud of you. They called you the wonderful Santro. You always gave folks your best then. Won't you *please* fight the way you used to?" she pleaded.

He smiled, but she noticed that his keen eyes—with a guilty look in them, she thought—avoided hers.

"Won't you, Joe—please—for me," she begged.

"I can't," said he, again avoiding her glance.

"Why not?" she demanded, her trim little figure becoming tense, a growing suspicion in her eyes.

"I can't tell you," he replied, in a guilty manner. "It's a secret." She got to her feet then, drawing herself to her full height and gazed down at him scornfully, her clear, blue, Irish eyes blazing.

"So it *is* true," said she witheringly. "You *are* in with the sure-thing gamblers. I always thought you were so straight and—and—now I see you're nothing but a—common crook." Her voice broke at the last word and ended in a half sob. Santro glanced uncertainly at her for a moment and then left the room.

Meanwhile the sporting press, backed up by public opinion, was gradually forcing Santro into a position where a decision bout over a distance of at least twenty rounds was fast becoming imperative. Santro saw that he must forsake his no-decision "waltzes" and consent to a long bout to a decision with one of the two leading featherweight contenders, Lew Shevlin, a rangy, fast youth with a good punch, or "Knock-out" Butler, a stocky, rugged, rushing battler.

Although neither was considered to be at all the equal of the champion by the experts, they had won all of their recent bouts decisively and were, the boxing world felt, entitled to a real chance.

An offer for a twenty-round fight with Butler was made by the Sunset Club of Reno, Nevada. This was declined by Santro, who insisted on a bout with Shevlin, instead. The club promoters held out for Butler until Santro threatened to call off the affair entirely unless he had his way. Whereupon they agreed to Shevlin. The sport writers regarded Santro's insistence on his opponent with some degree of suspicion and some even hinted at collusion, but no proof of an "agreement" was discovered. Yet, in his training for this fight the champion appeared to be in deadly earnest.

He arrived at the battle site six weeks before the date of the contest and worked himself into superb shape. With the news of his thorough preparation public interest rose to high pitch, and on the eve of the battle Ed Tuttle, who was sent to cover the fight for a New York daily, interviewed Santro and pinned him down to a definite statement.

"Are you going to carry Shevlin along tomorrow or are you out for a quick, decisive win?" he asked with dry sarcasm.

"If I can knock that guy out in the first round, I'll do it," stated Santro. When this news was circulated the betting odds immediately lengthened. They rose to three to one on the champion to win by a knock-out. Few conceded the challenger a real chance to win, but many skeptical ones gambled that Santro would allow his opponent to stay the limit.

The result however, astounded the sport world. For, after going after Shevlin viciously in the first three rounds, the champion pursued his defensive tactics. His blocking and slipping of punches was marvelous, his footwork dazzling as of old. But after several furious mix-ups in mid-ring he fought an almost entirely defensive battle, a crafty, cool, cunning fight, smiling deri-

sively when he made his opponent miss and grinning disdainfully when he received any punishment.

Cries of "fake" came from the open-air audience from the fifth round on. The cries increased in the eighth when Shevlin, emboldened by his apparent success, forced the fighting furiously; and they thickened to an outburst in the twelfth when Santro appeared to wilt gradually under the attack.

"He's stalling," "He's throwing the fight," "The crook," came the charges thick and fast in the fourteenth round when Santro went to the floor from a body blow and when, in the sixteenth, the champion was driven against the ropes, battered and beaten by the now furiously aggressive Shevlin and sent to the floor by a slashing right cross to the body, there was an accusing uproar.

Santro lay against a ring post, the hot sun beating down upon his black head, a twisted, peculiar smile upon his thin lips. At the count of "eight" he struggled to rise, slipped back and heard the fatal "ten," with a disdainful grin upon his lips.

As Shevlin, the new champion, leaped delightedly over the ropes to the madly surging crowd one of the club promoters jumped into the ring.

"It's a sell out," he roared angrily. "A damned sell out. The little crook sold his title for money. I'll have this investigated."

Two days later Santro voluntarily appeared before the boxing commissioner to answer to the charge of throwing the fight and with it his title. He sat in the commissioner's office, a tired, wan look in his face, a haggard light in his eyes, but with the old confident, disdainful smile playing upon his lips. Ed Tuttle was there as were also other news writers, the club promoters, Tommy Keith, Shevlin and his manager, and Mrs. Santro, who was looking sadly at her husband.

Davies, the boxing commissioner, sternly recited the charge against the little pugilist. He mentioned, as an incriminating incident, the fact that Santro had held out for a match with Shevlin and refused one with Butler. And after a scathing, biting address, he said:

"How much did you get, either in a straight sell out for cash or in bets, for your title?"

"Not a cent—outside of my honest share of the purse," replied Santro slowly.

"Don't lie," snapped Davies. "You've been suspended on and off for two years for stalling. And two days ago you weren't even unconscious when they counted you out. You had a grin on your face, at that!"

"It ain't a lie," declared Santro evenly. "Shevlin got me with a body punch—solar plexus. Sure I was conscious; but I couldn't get up. I mighta had a grin but, believe me, I didn't have nothin' to grin at. And for the rest, I never framed a fight in my life. You ain't got any proof that I did and you never will have—'cause there ain't any."

Santro leaned forward in his chair and grinned.

"For about two years now," said he, "I been kiddin' the public——"

"To say the least," interjected Tuttle dryly.

"But," continued the ex-champion, "I been kiddin' them other fighters most of all. I been slipping for two years. I knew it first in my fight with 'Scully' Walters. Then's when I got wise that my heart had gone bad on me—and I've never dared let myself out since. Of course, Scully Walters stayed right with me. My punch was gone. I hadda stall and tin-can all the last two rounds to keep him from gettin' me—but the poor boob didn't know it. I got set down for six months for that fight, when I did my best.

"I tried to knock out Jeff Dunne and was lucky to outpoint him. Tony Roco nearly knocked my knob off in Milwaukee, in the third round—but he didn't know it—and I stalled and kidded him into thinkin' I could name the round and knock him out. I got a year suspension from Wisconsin for that. In every scrap I ever had I've done my best. I ought never to of been set down at all for stalling. In fact, I been darn lucky to keep my title this long."

"Why didn't you protest against the suspensions—demand your rights?" asked Davies interestedly.

"And let them other fighters know I was slipping—that my punch was gone?" grinned Santro. "No chance. Those suspensions were helping me—they played right in my hands. They made them other boobs think I *was* framing and tin-canning. It kept me a high-priced drawing card two years longer. With my reputation them other boobs felt lucky I didn't knock 'em out in a coupla rounds.

"Of course my experience and my defense

helped a lot, too. But a few of them good kids like Roco and Dunne might of got my title, if they went after it right."

"You deliberately allowed yourself to be suspended—in fact, courted suspensions?" asked the amazed Davies.

"Sure," smiled Santro. "Tommy Keith and me was the only ones who knew about it. We kept it a secret. Even my wife thought I was pulling fights."

"Is this true?" asked Davies of Keith, who was known for his honesty.

"All of it," replied Tommy solemnly. "Joe never pulled a fight in his life. He *was* slipping two years ago. We even thought of retiring until that first suspension gave us the idea."

Davies glanced keenly at Santro. "All right for that part of it," said he briskly, "but how about this last fight here. You turned down 'K. O.' Butler to get Shevlin. If anything, Lew's the better boy of the two. You even risked calling off the fight to get Shevlin. It looks suspicious. Did you have an agreement with Shevlin?"

"No," denied Santro, "and Shevlin'll prove it. And, anyway, I didn't care about him getting the match. It was Arlie Packard, his manager, I wanted to help. I knew that either Shevlin or Butler would probably beat me in a long fight—and it was a showdown; so long as I hadda take a trimming, anyway, I wanted to see Arlie Packard manager of a champion."

"Why?" asked Davies.

The other didn't reply for a few moments. A musing look came into his hard, keen eyes. Then he drew forth a pocketbook, took a carefully folded, soiled bank note from it, and held it so that the others saw it was a dirty, worn dollar bill.

"I been champion seven years," continued Santro slowly in a hard voice, the smile gone from his eyes. "In that time I cleaned up nearly a half million dollars in the ring.

"So I got no kick coming. I got mine. The champs at anything in this little old world, always do. It's the pork-and-beaners who get the leavings, and my brother Frankie was always a pork-and-beaner—a prelim performer. He's dead now. He went the day I won the title."

Davies yawned and wondered what the other was leading to.

"When we buried him it was raining," continued Santro. "He didn't even draw a sunshiny day then. But just when we left the cemetery the sun come out. Tommy Keith remarked it. He says, 'Sun for the champs and rain for the prelim guys.' I'll never forget it. It's always so.

"And I got this one-case note," Santro continued, smoothing the soiled, worn bill, "I got this case note one night when Frankie was farther away from the sunshine than ever. He had just been knocked out in a prelim fight. I knew why. He went in the ring hungry—and sick—and without any supper and just caved in from weakness.

"There was maybe five thousand people in the house that night and no one, from the referee in the ring to the six-bit boys in the rafters, cared enough to slip him a second look. Except one fat guy, smoking a fifty-cent cigar in a ringside seat. He got a good laugh out of Frankie. We didn't expect 'em to care. Frankie wasn't a winner.

"Then, in the dressing room Gus Kramer handed Frankie a second trimming for losing. And he held out our fifty-fifty split of our fifteen-dollar prelim purse. And, believe me, we was both dog-gone hungry, too. Then, just when it looked like no eats for us, that night, a guy butts into the dressing room, bawls out Gus, and slips me five dollars in single bills. I was seventeen years old then, and in all those seventeen years it was the first time I ever remembered a guy doing anything for us without some kinda pay. This guy prob'ly forgot it right away—prob'ly don't know to this day who we were—but I always remembered it," said Santro slowly. "And this dollar bill is one of them five. I always kept it. We hadda cash the other four for grub; but somehow I hung on to this one."

"And what's all this got to do with the lost fight?" interrupted Davies.

"Just this," answered Santro, "the guy who slipped me this dollar ten years ago was Arlie Packard, Shevlin's manager."

Packard started, his eyes widening in recollection as the ten-year-old incident came back to him.

"So you're the ragged kid I slipped that money to?" said he.

Santro nodded; then he turned to Davies.

"Shevlin beat me fair and square," said he. "He's a corking boy and oughta make a fine champ. But at that, maybe this fight *was* a sell out." He grinned good-naturedly.

"I guess," he concluded, "you might say that I sold the featherweight title to Packard for a dollar bill."

When Dynevor Died

By William Morton Ferguson

Author of "The Guilty One," "Apple Green," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Morney goes to Pinelake to work as a chemist for Rutherford & Co., makers of patent medicines, and while walking along a road with Hamlet, a stray dog who has adopted him, times an automobile and, a few minutes past seven, sees it crash into a telegraph pole. Running to the wreck, he finds a woman dead at the wheel, and Jill, Rutherford's daughter, stunned. Doctor Dicksee arrives, tells Morney that the dead woman is Mrs. Dynevor, and they all go to the Dynevor home, where Tomlinson, the butler, tells them that Mr. Dynevor died of apoplexy at exactly seven o'clock. Morney finds some whisky in a glass, is suspicious, and takes it away in a bottle. On his way home he is attacked, and when he recovers consciousness some days later in the hospital, Doctor Potts tells him that he was robbed of everything he had in his pockets, including the bottle. Smith, a detective, calls on him, and he learns that Dynevor's first wife was Rutherford's sister, and that Rutherford is related to Amos Hammersley, Pinelake's leading citizen, with whose son, Caspar, Morney has had trouble. Upon Morney's return to his boarding house, Gabriel Poynter, a lawyer, attempts to bribe him to say that Mrs. Dynevor was killed before seven. While on his way to Sunday dinner at Rutherfords' he meets Jill, after having sustained embarrassing injuries to his clothing in a fight with Skelly, the dog catcher. At the Rutherfords', Amos Hammersley attempts to bribe Morney to give false testimony regarding the time of Mrs. Dynevor's death, and failing, accuses him of having been in prison in Scotland, a charge which Morney admits, and which causes him to lose his position with Rutherford. Hammersley also brings pressure on Rutherford to have Jill change her testimony, but in vain. Satisfied that Dynevor was killed by nicotine in his whisky, Morney gives the authorities information that leads to the exhumation of Dynevor's body. Morney starts to tell Jill the story of his trouble in Scotland, but is interrupted. He learns that the autopsy has proved that Dynevor was poisoned.

(A Four-Part Story—Part III.)

CHAPTER XIV.

THE authorities had done something in the way of investigation, since learning that it might prove to be a murder case, besides keeping an eye on Tomlinson and Mrs. Bowles. This couple still occupied the place as caretakers, pending the settlement of the estate, and Smith and the sheriff, Chief Hook and a detective by the name of Stoll, had been over the premises. In this investigation there was much that would have provoked a smile from the cynical Potts, a little by-play discernible only to the initiated. For these four, divided into opposing couples, were quite as much concerned in watching each other as in gathering information for the inquest. Potts might have said that Hook and his right-hand man, Stoll, were there to see that Scott and Smith didn't manufacture some evidence detrimental to Hammersley.

Potts' remark that Hammersley still had the police department virtually in his pocket rested on the fact that Hook and Stoll had survived the reform wave that swept the new mayor and sheriff into office and undermined Hammersley's power. Few doubted their part in the wide-open old régime, that many wished to see restored, but they had succeeded in beating every charge brought against them by the so-called Purity League headed by Quiller and Scott. And when the lid closed down they philosophically accepted the fact, firm in the conviction that it was only a question of time until the good old days returned.

But being nothing if not politicians, there was outward amity and concord between them and what they termed "the white ribbon gang," though at heart they had a large contempt for reformers and especially for the rosy-cheeked new sheriff; they said that Quiller was a crank, but that Scott was a hypocrite.

At the Dynevor home they made the inevitable, but none the less important, discovery that the poison used had been made by Dynevor in his own laboratory, a room opening off the study and with a single win-

dow giving on the side veranda. Here Dynevor had pursued as a hobby the line of work that had engaged him all his life. He was by no means a savant, merely a good analytical chemist whose practical efforts at research, so far as anybody had known, were confined to patent medicines; but obviously he had devoted much time to the study of mineral and vegetable poisons.

There was a little cabinet of vials, all neatly arrayed and labeled with the signs of the chemical formulæ, containing a variety of poisons and among them was one bearing the cabalistic letters and numerals C10 H14 N2 that represented nicotine. Moreover there was ample evidence of its preparation, such as tobacco leaf midribs and a Saxhlet apparatus used in the Kissling process. This discovery seemed naturally to support the suicide theory until it was shown that the poison might have been stolen. This fact, unearthed by Smith, was brought out clearly during the examination of Tomlinson, the first witness, at the inquest which was held on the following Monday.

"I don't know anything about drugs and poisons," he said, after repeating substantially what he had told at the time of Dynevor's death, "and none of the help was ever allowed into the laboratory. When Mr. Dynevor went out he always locked the door connecting with the study—yes, sir, that's the only entrance except for the window on the side veranda."

"And did he always lock it also when he left?"

Yes, that had been his rule but on one occasion he had forgotten—on the night preceding his death. He had remained in the study or laboratory until ten o'clock when he had gone upstairs. It was Tomlinson's duty, the last thing at night, to see that the doors and windows on the ground floor were locked and, as he was unable to enter the laboratory, he always examined the window from the side veranda. On this occasion, finding the screen down but the window still open, he had promptly informed Mr. Dynevor.

"When I told him he seemed quite upset, sir. 'It's that screen,' he says. 'It fooled me, for I haven't got used to it yet; I saw it was down and thought the window was, too. I mustn't forget again.' He came down with me and unlocked the laboratory, and that was the first time I was ever in the room. He went over and unlocked a small cabinet, and I saw it was full of little glass bottles; he had never spoken to me about whatever work he was doing, but he did now. 'Tomlinson,' he says, 'if I'm going to forget about that window, I'll have to get a safe put in here or a different sort of lock on that cabinet; I guess any child could open it. There's nothing worth stealing here, nothing that would bring any great amount of money, but it could do a lot of damage, if it got into ignorant or unscrupulous hands. I'm a bit absent-minded at times, as you see, and somebody might get a dose of poison, thinking it whisky.' And he chuckled."

"Did he lead you to think, by speech or actions, that somebody might have entered the room that night? What did he do after going to the cabinet?"

"He took out a bottle, sir, sort of furtive like, and held it up to the light. So far as I could see it was filled with nothing but water."

"Would you say it was that bottle?" And the vial of colorless nicotine, found in the cabinet, was passed over. It was two-thirds full.

"I couldn't swear to it, sir, for I didn't have much of a chance to see it. But that looks like it. Mr. Dynevor seemed greatly pleased like and put it back in the cabinet. Yes, sir, I got the impression that, perhaps, he considered it more valuable than the others and was relieved to find it all right."

"Do you know if the rule about entering the laboratory extended even to Mrs. Dynevor?"

"I can't say, sir; I know that only once, to my knowledge, she went to the study when Mr. Dynevor wasn't there. And, of course, I never saw her in the laboratory."

Asked, by a juror, when Mrs. Dynevor left the house on the day of the tragedy and where her husband was at the time, he replied that she had left about three o'clock and that Mr. Dynevor was in his room where he generally went after lunch. "I was in the dining room," he explained, "which is across the hall from the study, and I saw Mrs. Dynevor go in and close the door. She came out in about five minutes and then left the house. About half an hour later Mr. Dynevor came down and went in."

"Did he remain there continuously?" asked the coroner.

Tomlinson replied that he couldn't say; the door was shut and, though he had been

back and forth a good deal, Mr. Dynevor might have gone upstairs again more than once without his knowledge.

"Although you admitted no visitors that day," said Quiller, "it would have been quite possible for one to have entered, without your knowledge, as, in fact, one actually did?"

"Yes, sir; I was on the other side of the house and wouldn't have seen anybody. And it began to get dark about six. I didn't hear Miss Rutherford talking with Mr. Dynevor; it's a very solid, well-built house, sir, and you couldn't hear his typewriter working unless you listened special."

"Did you ever have any reason to think that the deceased might contemplate taking his own life?"

Tomlinson's reply was emphatic. "No, sir; he was about the last person I'd have thought of connecting with suicide. He wasn't that kind, sir; he'd kill trouble before he let it kill him. He was too fond of life, sir."

"And had he any particular trouble or worry? Was there any one whom you might call an enemy?"

As the butler hesitated, and coughed behind his hand, the juror who had put the question about Mrs. Dynevor now inquired if the relations between husband and wife had been entirely amicable.

"Differences occur in every household," said the coroner, "and you must entirely disregard all gossip. To your own certain knowledge was there any serious trouble between them?"

"Well, yes, sir," replied Tomlinson reluctantly. "I don't know what it was about, but they quarreled very violent at times."

This practically completed his testimony, and that of Mrs. Bowles was given next. It proved in the main to be merely an echo of the butler's; she could add nothing new and, while admitting that the increasingly violent quarrels between husband and wife were common knowledge in the servants' hall, professed entire ignorance of the cause. A nervous and apparently stupid woman, made more nervous, perhaps, by her fleeting appearance in the local spotlight, she soon made room, with evident relief, for Theodore Dicksee.

The first part of his evidence dealt with his treatment of Mr. Dynevor and the finding of the remains; how he had no reason to think it other than a case of cerebral apoplexy and how, under similar circumstances, any practitioner would have been deceived. Next was made clear to the jury the similarity in the appearance of a victim of apoplexy and one killed by nicotine, also the comparative rarity of the poison and its swift action. Dicksee admitted that he knew very little about it.

"Had you any knowledge that the deceased was experimenting with nicotine?" asked the coroner.

None whatever, otherwise his suspicions might have been aroused, just as they most certainly would have been had the dregs in that tumbler not been removed behind his back. And he turned and gave Morney a look of righteous indignation. "I was never in the laboratory," he added, "and Mr. Dynevor didn't discuss his work or hobby with me."

"In your opinion, was the deceased's state of health such as to prey upon his mind?" pursued Quiller.

"No, certainly not; he knew that he should take certain precautions, but that he might live as long as the next. He was in no sense an invalid and, indeed, treated the matter so lightly that, as I say, I had great difficulty in making him see the necessity of a restricted diet. I agree with the first witness that he appeared to be one of the last people who would contemplate self-destruction and certainly he gave me no reason to suspect he ever thought of it."

The irrepressible juror arose. "Were you intimately acquainted with Mrs. Dynevor?"

"No," said Dicksee stiffly. "I knew her simply as the wife of an old patient, though I prescribed for her also on occasion."

"May I ask your opinion of the alleged trouble between the deceased and his wife?" said Quiller.

"Although in a sense I was a family friend, I was never the confidant of either," replied Dicksee. "I couldn't be altogether blind to the friction that existed between them, but I'd no knowledge of the cause. To me it seemed trivial enough, the opposing viewpoint of two people of widely different ages. It was natural that one should wish to participate in social pleasures, the other to remain at home with his studies. So far as I could see, or wished to see, that was the only cause of friction, and I didn't consider it ineradicable. I think much harm was done by idle and malicious gossip. It is generally so in such cases."

CHAPTER XV.

Morney's name was called next. Of course his part in the affair was known to the authorities, but now it had to be gone into again for the benefit of the jury. He gave his evidence in the same brief manner that distinguished him at the previous inquest and, in explaining how he had come to remove the dregs in the tumbler he made no mention of his lack of faith in Doctor Dicksee. It was patent that, a stranger to the Dynevors and all concerned, he had owned no sinister motive; he would have had absolutely no motive in destroying the evidence and, if he had elected to say nothing, nobody would have been the wiser. He had done everything possible to rectify his mistake.

"You delayed speaking of the matter because you weren't sure of the nature of the dregs in that tumbler?" said Quiller. "You wished to analyze it yourself? You were carried away by an excess of zeal, not altogether an unknown characteristic in a young man. Fortunately your mistake wasn't irreparable though, of course, I must censure it. It might have had very serious consequences, and I think you have learned a lesson."

The coroner then went on to speak of the assault and the theft of the bottle. Morney was asked if he had any idea of the identity of his assailant and, having replied in the negative, Quiller inquired if it were possible for any one to have seen him removing the contents of the tumbler. Morney explained how a person on the side veranda could have watched him through the half-closed blinds of the study windows. "This only occurred to me afterward," he said, "and at the time I didn't see or hear any one."

He then told about the number of visitors that had arrived and how, in the general confusion, it would have been an easy matter for any one lurking in the grounds to leave undetected. "It would have been quite possible for some one to have watched me leave the house and for them to have then hurried on and lain in wait for me at that spot." It was made clear how this was his inevitable homeward route; there were two other bridges spanning the lake, but the logical course from the Merrion Road was by way of the Hammersley Turnpike. "I walked slowly," he said; and he then related how, after crossing the bridge, his dog had gone in pursuit of a rabbit. "Otherwise he might have warned me. I wasn't followed; somebody was waiting for me at that spot, and it couldn't have been chosen better. But I don't know if they were waiting for me particularly or just somebody they thought worth the robbing."

"While in the study did you notice if the laboratory door was open?"

"It was closed; I happened to notice that particularly. Of course, I didn't know there was a laboratory, and I made no attempt to open the door." Questioned further, he said the door was on a line with the desk.

"It is assumed," pursued Quiller, "that the deceased was typewriting shortly before his death; aside from the exposed machine, the paper, and carbons, did you notice any direct evidence that would bear out this assumption? Did you see a letter or anything that might have been recently written?"

"There was nothing, so far as I observed."

At this point the irrepressible juror broke out again. "May I ask the witness what made him decide to speak about taking the stuff from that glass?"

"I thought it over and came to the conclusion that it was my duty," replied Morney.

"Had it anything to do with your being discharged from Rutherford & Co.? May I ask why you were discharged and if it's true you——"

"That has nothing to do with this inquiry," intervened Quiller. "I cannot allow such irrelevant questions. Jurors must confine themselves to pertinent queries. You are excused, Mr. Morney. Call the next witness."

This was Jill Rutherford, and her evidence covered what she had told at the former inquest, her reason for calling that evening at the Dynevor home. She was asked if she were a frequent visitor, and she replied that she hadn't had much opportunity of knowing Mrs. Dynevor, for the latter had been married in August of the previous year, and she, Jill, had returned to college in September. She had come home only a fortnight ago, and thus their actual acquaintance had been a matter of weeks.

"I knew Mr. Dynevor was generally in the study at that hour," she said, "and I meant simply to give my message through the open window. But he raised the screen and asked me to come in as there was something he

wished to say. Must I repeat our conversation?"

"Yes, if it bears in any way on this inquiry. What was it about?"

She hesitated, looking acutely distressed. "About himself and Mrs. Dynevor," she replied in a low voice. "He said that, of course, I had seen they weren't happy and he wanted to know what she had told me. I said she had never discussed her married life with me, and he replied that she must have, that she had given me a wrong opinion of the matter and that in consequence I was avoiding him. I think he hardly realized what he was saying, for he ended by asking me to spy on his wife, to tell him where she went and whom she saw. Of course I refused."

"Did Mrs. Dynevor ever speak of her husband's work or say anything that would lead you to believe she knew of his experiments with nicotine?"

"No, never."

"The deceased gave you to understand that he was jealous of his wife? Did he mention any particular person?"

"No."

"Was he typewriting when you entered?"

"No, I didn't hear the sound of it as I approached the open window, but the machine was uncovered, and I noticed two sheets of paper and a purple carbon between them, as if he had been about to write when I interrupted. But he didn't place them in the machine while I was there."

"Did you observe the tumbler of whisky and soda on the desk?"

"Yes, it was half full; he didn't touch it in my presence."

"Did he convey the impression of one who meditated suicide?"

"No, not to my mind. He was angry and upset, but it didn't seem to me the sort of mood in which a person would think of taking his own life." She added that she had left, by way of the window, at about a quarter past six, and at that time Mr. Dynevor had begun on the meal brought by Tomlinson; whatever his state of mind, it didn't interfere with his appetite, for he ate with customary relish.

"On leaving, you proceeded into town and called for Mrs. Dynevor at the bridge party she was attending? Did you notice anything unusual in her manner, anything to suggest that she was aware of what might be transpiring in her absence?"

"Nothing whatever; she was entirely normal in every way."

An adjournment was taken at this point, and on the resumption of the inquest Samuel Rutherford was called. He stated that many of the vegetable and mineral poisons found in Dynevor's laboratory, such as belladonna and antimony, had been used at the factory. On the dissolution of the partnership Dynevor had removed certain articles that he claimed as personal property and which had gone to the elaborate equipment of his private laboratory; but nicotine had never been used in any of the firm's products, and Rutherford said he had no knowledge of Dynevor's experiments with it nor could he imagine to what use the other intended to put it.

"Didn't know what he was up to and had no interest," he said in his telegraphic speech. "Never in the house since his marriage."

"Were your relations with the deceased entirely friendly?"

"No, can't say that; didn't like his marrying again so soon after my sister's death. Guess the whole town knows that."

Amos Hammersley appeared next and he faced his old political opponent much as a bull, which he so strongly suggested, might face a dog suspected of mischief. He spoke loudly and aggressively and was evidently more than ready to toss the coroner if he exceeded the duties of his office. He professed equal ignorance regarding the bottle of nicotine, stating that since his cousin's marriage he had seen very little of him.

"I told him he was a fool to marry a woman half his age and that he couldn't expect her to marry him for love. He resented it, of course. I don't intend to say anything about Mrs. Dynevor; she's dead and it ain't my way to hit a man, much less a woman, when he's down. But I'll give it as my opinion that my cousin had a right to be jealous—I guess maybe more right than he knew—and nobody can tell me that he killed himself. I'll never believe it."

CHAPTER XVI.

The inquest dragged on, witnesses being frequently recalled, but at the end of it all the jury decided that James Dynevor had come to his death through misadventure and they brought in a verdict accordingly. In their opinion there was no evidence to justify either the suicide or murder theory and,

therefore, the unfortunate gentleman must have taken the fatal dose by accident. It had been shown that he was absent-minded, a fatal failing for one handling deadly poisons. And had he not been excited and upset immediately prior to the tragedy? In all likelihood he had mistaken the nicotine for water, used a glass that already contained the poison with which he had been experimenting. Needless to say, few believed this explanation, perhaps not even the authors of it, but at least it had the merit of probability, which is more than can be said for some verdicts.

"You couldn't expect anything else," said Smith to Potts and Morney when they met that evening in the doctor's quarters. "No matter how careful you was, you couldn't get a jury in this county that wasn't packed. That's Hammersley's game, of course—to hang it on Mrs. Dynevor. The worst of it is there's so darn much to support it. Of course the butler and the others weren't telling all they knew; everybody knows that the Dynevors fought like bolsheviki. That stuff of Dicksee's, about her indulging in social pleasures, was good. He knows she was ready to flirt with anything in pants and that all she cared about was Dynevor's money."

"Well, what else could you expect?" retorted Potts. "Everybody knows also that the best woman in the world couldn't have put up with him. Did he expect that any one would marry him for love? The man, from all I've heard, was a brute, and I could never understand how Miss Rutherford married him or how, in fact, Rutherford formed a friendship with him in the first place. It let him in, too, for the Hammersley connection and all that. Dynevor was notoriously unfaithful to his first wife and, if his second one turned the tables, it's no more than he deserved. But I never believed half the tales they told about her; of course, the women were always against her, because of her looks and style."

Smith shook his head. "There's something in that but not everything. Take it from me, there's always something wrong with folks that ain't popular with their own sex. More than once when Mrs. Dynevor was supposed to be at a tea fight, or up in New York, she wasn't there at all."

"Talk," said Potts.

"Facts," said Smith. "And if you went out a bit and mixed in the social whirl of this great metropolis, you'd know it for facts. Everybody can't be wrong. No, the whole case is dead against Mrs. Dynevor. You'll find mighty few in this town who don't believe that she'd a secret lover and that, after knowing that a will wasn't made against her, she got rid of Dynevor in a way that only for you, Mr. Morney, wouldn't have been discovered."

"In that case," said Morney, "can they explain how the poison was administered? According to the evidence she could only have done it just before leaving the house—when Tomlinson saw her go into the study. Now the whisky in that decanter was all right, for I sampled it, and the important point to remember is that nicotine oxidizes on exposure to air and light, becoming brown. If Mrs. Dynevor knew anything about it she would know that; she would know that the color would betray it unless it was mixed with the whisky. Therefore, that glass of whisky and soda must have been standing there since before lunch—which I think most improbable. From all I've heard of Mr. Dynevor's habits he wasn't one to leave a drink unfinished or to wait so long between drinks."

"The jury wasn't worrying with that little detail," said Smith. "And, of course, it's possible that the drink was standing there or that Mrs. Dynevor reckoned that, if she prepared one, he would take it anyway. Being absent-minded he might think he'd left it, and he didn't care where a drink come from so long as it come. He wouldn't know that she'd been in the study, and there's no evidence to show that he ever suspected she might poison him. But you've put your finger on the real point, Mr. Morney—that it ain't likely he'd let a drink stand at his elbow for three hours or so; I'll bet he had more'n one from the time he entered the study at three-thirty until Miss Rutherford saw him at six."

"Couldn't that be proved by the decanter?" suggested Morney. "Couldn't Tomlinson give an approximate estimate of the amount used during the day?"

Smith shook his head. "That was something he was supposed to know nothing about—where Dynevor got his supply. Of course, it come through Hammersley and you can't tell me it was all stocked before we went bone dry. But you'll never get evidence against the speak-easies and the secret trade, with old man Hook in the chair."

"I guess the government people would have got it long ago, to say nothing of local talent, if there was any truth in it," said Potts. "You'll be having Hammersley down next as the king of booze smugglers. He's no such fool—putting a rope round his neck for you and the Quiller-Scott bunch to yank."

"Oh, I ain't saying there's any great trade; but there's some, all right. And you've got me down wrong, doc," added Smith injuredly. "I ain't one of the local Band of Hope; I'm an honest detective, playing no favorites. No, siree, I'd enough of politics on the Chicago team."

"You don't mean to say you were ever a real detective?" laughed the house physician.

"Now, would you listen to that!" exclaimed Smith. "Just because a guy has put on a little fat and likes to wear comfortable clothes—sure I was a real detective, and a most promisin' one, only I got nipped in the bud. You remember the big Traders' National Bank robbery? Oh, well, it was years ago—an amateur stunt but, by bull luck, they got off with a big haul. I had the guy that pulled it all marked—and he turned out to be the mayor's son. Hard luck? I'll say so; I was called off, and I never gotta nother chance at nothing.

"What? Why, you didn't know Chi in them days; the mayor wasn't no better than his son, only he called his stealing by a more refined name. The whole administration was the same, and they could only feel safe when they was all at a public banquet where they could watch each other. That's why they gave so many of 'em. What? No, I hadn't any direct evidence, and they made it so I didn't get any, either; he got off with the swag, and I guess his old man squared it with the bank."

"That was hard luck," commented Potts solemnly. "And you didn't get another chance?"

Smith sighed heavily. "I was too honest and able for 'em, and they kept me at small-time stuff. Them highbinders in the seats of the mighty knew that if I ever gotta chance and cut loose I'd get 'em sure. So they kept me down. I put up with it year after year, always hoping for a chance to show my real talent and always finding one administration as bad as the next. Finally I chucked it and decided to try a small burg, so I come here. And what do I find? Why, that a small burg is just the same as a big one. No, doc, I ain't playing politics and never did.

"I'm just an honest detective that's been asking the world these twenty years for a chance to show his real talent. And now, by gravy, it's come. I don't care if Quiller's a crank or Scott's a hypocrite; the point is, they've made it possible for an honest and capable man to have a chance—meanin' the original John Smith. That's how I come to be lined up with 'em. This case of Dynevor's only started and, when it's finished, I'll be turning down government jobs."

"If you expect to make your reputation off Amos Hammersley——" And Potts shook his head. "Of course, it's been proved that anybody could have stolen the poison; but the motive? Even supposing that Hammersley needed money, and that's an absurd supposition—"

"Is it?" said Smith. "He seems to have wanted it bad enough to try subornation of perjury."

"It's a long way from that to murdering his cousin," retorted the house physician. "But even granting that, wasn't there Mrs. Dynevor between him and the inheritance?"

"Yeh, and did she stay there long?"

Morney gave Smith a startled glance while Potts exclaimed incredulously, "Do you mean to say that—that you think she was murdered, too?"

Smith looked profound. "Well, I guess maybe it wouldn't be the first time a blowout happened sort of handy. You can make 'em to order easy enough. It's a great pity the car was so smashed up; I'd like to have had an expert go over them tires. Now, hold on!" as Morney made an angry exclamation, "it's got nothing to do with Miss Rutherford; leaving everything else outa it, would she be likely to risk her neck on the chance of breaking somebody else's? Now, look at it this way: she's gotta reputation for pretty reckless driving, she's gotta new car and it's ten to one she'll do some extra speeding. It's known that she's gonna bring Mrs. Dynevor home——"

"Known to whom?" asked Potts. "I suppose Tomlinson, in the secret pay of Hammersley, sneaked out and stuck a fork in the tire when he heard she was going to call for Mrs. Dynevor? But why didn't the blowout happen on her way to town? You should try writing scenarios for the movies, Smith; that may be your real talent."

"Any guy that knew something about tires

could fix it for a blow-out to happen within a certain time," pronounced Smith oracularly. "I've got some brains and imagination. Miss Rutherford showed her new boat around, and I guess there was plenty of opportunity for the trick to have been done. That's all I'm saying just at present."

"Why did the coroner ask so particularly if Mr. Dynevor had been writing a letter?"

Smith redoubled his look of profundity. "Well, that might be a very important point, and we were hoping to prove something by it. You see it was Dynevor's habit to make a carbon copy of his correspondence and file it. Now, although Miss Rutherford says that it looked as if he was getting all ready to write, we could find no letter. Yes, of course, we examined the filing cabinet—but Hammersley had been there first. Aside from anything else, he reached the house that night shortly after you'd left, Mr. Morney—Doctor Dicksee wasn't long after you—and he took full possession. He was there at least fifteen minutes before I come."

"Oh," said Potts, "and he removed this incriminating letter? But then Mr. Morney, who was there before him, says there wasn't any letter."

"And don't that show that somebody was there after Miss Rutherford left?" retorted Smith triumphantly. "The same person who doped the glass removed the letter. He got into the laboratory through the window when Dynevor was in the study, the connecting door being closed; then Dynevor went upstairs for something—didn't Tomlinson say he wouldn't have known if that had happened?—and he left that glass of whisky and soda there. Our friend dopes the drink and slips back into the laboratory. Dynevor returns, takes a gulp of the stuff and croaks. Tomlinson and the housekeeper rush in, give one look, and beat it. Our friend wants that letter that Dynevor has written, maybe others, too; that's why he's still hiding in the laboratory, having counted on the butler and housekeeper doing just what they did.

"He sneaks out, grabs the letter, and goes through the filing cabinet for others. He takes too much time or, perhaps, finds he can't leave without being seen. Anyway, Doctor Dicksee arrives and he's trapped. He dodges back into the laboratory and watches through the keyhole. He hears the doc say it's apoplexy—just what he expected—and he knows he's safe; but then he sees you, Mr. Morney, remove the dregs from the glass. He sees you've only suspicions and that you mean to say nothing to Dicksee—otherwise why remove the stuff? So he beats it out, while you're all in the reception room, and relieves you of the only evidence. He reckons that you won't say anything about it, for fear of getting into trouble, or that nobody will believe you."

"It sounds convincing enough when you say it like that," admitted Potts. "But there's nothing to show that Dynevor wrote a letter. Couldn't he have changed his mind? Your whole theory hangs on that letter, for otherwise the murderer wouldn't have remained on the premises. Why, in the name of common sense, should there have been any correspondence between Hammersley and Dynevor and how could it be of an incriminating nature? Answer me that."

The imaginative and resourceful Smith was nothing daunted; he pointed out that there would be a correspondence for the simple reason that, since Dynevor's marriage, Hammersley had been virtually forbidden the house. He argued that the real reason of Hammersley's dislike for the second Mrs. Dynevor was the obvious one—that he didn't want any one coming between him and the estate. He held also that this wasn't the only cause of the recent estrangement between the cousins.

"There was something more back of it," he said. "I've pretty good evidence that they had more'n one scrap long before Dynevor's second marriage. Now, I don't believe Rutherford profited a penny when Hammersley was running things here——"

"That doesn't whitewash him," interrupted Potts. "He couldn't be blind to the fact that it was the firm's money and influence that made such license possible."

"Only up to a certain point," argued Smith. "But what I mean is that it's pretty certain that Dynevor got his secret rake-off if Rutherford didn't. He couldn't have salted by all that kale if he hadn't. He didn't get it all out of the firm; I guess the business ain't been doing too well, either. Now, supposing there was some trouble between them over this rake-off? Supposing Hammersley had lost a lot of money, wanted to borrow from his cousin, and was refused? The point is that I'll bet there was more trouble between them than any caused by Dynevor's marriage; that was only used by Hammersley as an excuse to explain why they weren't any longer on visiting terms."

"Well," summed up Potts, "of course you may be right, but I don't see how you ever expect to prove it. You'll have to travel some to hang anything on Amos Hammersley, do a whole lot better than you did at the inquest. It mightn't be a bad idea to abide by the verdict and save yourself some trouble—though that mightn't suit Quiller and Scott. It isn't wise to take all the chances offered you in this world; some folks can be very obliging when it pays them. I advise you to remember that there are more equations in the problem than Hammersley."

This discussion was typical of those that took place everywhere, because, notwithstanding the verdict of the jury, it was generally felt as Smith had said, that the Dynevor case had only begun; moreover that, however one viewed it, it was a very dirty puddle which in all likelihood would remain so. Its political aspect could not be ignored and Hammersley, it might be said, had won something of a hollow victory; if he had succeeded in securing a verdict of misadventure, and casting definite suspicion on the late Mrs. Dynevor, he could not avoid the finger of suspicion directed at himself.

His political opponents saw to that and, accurately shaving the libel law, kept it directed in the party press. To their great disappointment Morney had refused to bring the matter of his attempted bribery into court, notwithstanding the urgings of the pink-cheeked Scott who did him the honor of a personal visit.

Morney, pointing out the obvious fact that he lacked all evidence to substantiate such a charge, saw quite clearly that the sheriff wasn't worrying about that; however the case went it would mean the whole thing being aired and another political bullet for Hammersley. He could not escape the conviction that Potts was right, that he was being used as a weapon and that these seeming friends cared little what happened to him so long as he fulfilled their purpose. The interview which had begun in the most cordial manner, with Scott hailing him as a fellow reformer, closed on a less harmonious chord.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I think it's shameful," said Jill Rutherford. "They might as well have brought in a verdict of murder against poor Mrs. Dynevor and have been done with it."

They sat on a fallen tree in a little sun-splashed glade, facing the lake, while Hamlet mounted guard.

"I've heard a good deal about her," said Morney. "What was she really like?"

The girl considered. "I can't say honestly that I could ever have cared for her very much; she always reminded me somehow of a beautiful show window that has no real goods in stock. Her main object in life seemed to be having what she called a good time; and I don't doubt that she deceived Mr. Dynevor, went places and saw people he knew nothing about.

"My father didn't want me to have anything to do with her. But I was sorry for her, and I felt that behind it all she was perhaps as lonely as myself. She seemed to have no home life, no background. She suggested what certain novelists would call a woman with a past."

"Mr. Baldwin's expression was that she had been a waif on the Barbary Coast. And the last the orphan asylum heard of her she was in England."

"Yes, she had evidently knocked about a good deal, and nobody knew where or how Mr. Dynevor and she first met; he came home from St. Louis with a wife, and that was all. They couldn't have known each other long, and it was perfectly obvious, of course, that she had simply sold her youth and beauty. I felt sorry for her as I would for any woman who married Mr. Dynevor. And then everybody was against her, for one reason or another, and I felt she hadn't a fair chance.

"I know that my father was prejudiced, not merely because of her taking my aunt's place so soon, but because he believed it was through her that Mr. Dynevor removed his money from the business. I happened to hear him discussing it with Mr. Hammersley at the time; he said she was entirely mercenary and that Mr. Dynevor couldn't see that all she wanted was to get her hands on unlimited cash.

"Well, if that was so, I think she soon discovered who signed the checks and that, however he might care for her, he cared more for his money. And I believe that that, perhaps as much as anything else, led to the trouble between them. Everybody knew that he held a tight grip on the purse strings—and that's what helps to make it look so bad for her. But I'll never believe she had anything to do with his death; she had her

faults, like us all, but certainly murder wasn't one of them.

"How do we know that she went into the study at that hour? There's only Tomlinson's word for that and a good many other things. How does anybody know that the whisky you examined in the decanter was the same that Mr. Dynevor drank? Tomlinson had the place to himself—for Mrs. Bowles wouldn't go near the room again—before Doctor Dicksee and you came. He had time to do many things. Oh, I've no right to suggest that and, of course, it's absurd; but it seems to be one of these horrible cases where you can suspect anybody. Why, they could even say that I did it!"

Morney nodded. "But the motive? That's the thing. Only for the lack of motive, I would have got into serious trouble over the removal of that stuff. If it could have been shown that I'd any interest——"

"And hadn't you?"

He looked up quickly. "What interest could I have had?"

She colored faintly. "Not interest but—well, call it a misguided sense of chivalry. Doctor Potts said—I visit the hospital, you know and was there yesterday—that one reason you decided to say nothing was that you wished to save me the notoriety."

Morney laughed. "You mustn't believe all that he says about me; he interprets everything too favorably."

"Yes, undoubtedly he thinks a great deal of you. He told me about you saving his brother's life—no, you needn't begin to squirm; your sin has found you out. I knew you were really a war hero in disguise. I always thought Doctor Potts to be a hard-hearted cynic, but he must have thought an awful lot of his brother, for he has all his letters written from France. He showed me the one describing the early morning attack on Hill One-forty-two, the charge through the wheat fields and into the woods; how you got separated and, with other strays, were hemmed in and how you fought your way out.

"Oh, yes, it's all there in black and white, even if it never appeared in the home papers and somebody else got the credit. You know Caspar Hammersley never did anything like that; he was one of the old Swivel-chair Invincibles that did such valiant service keeping the furniture warm. Thanks to his father's influence the only trenches he saw were the kind they lay pipes in."

"But somebody had to fill the swivel-chair jobs—and all the heroes weren't in the front line; not by a long shot."

She shook her head. "I know Caspar Hammersley, though he thinks I don't. The war didn't change everybody, and he brought back what he took out. He didn't leave his old character over there. He went because he had to—and even then managed to get the soft berth he's had all through life. What does he do? Pretends to manage his father's local real-estate office and spends half his time in New York or West Pinelake. He fights his dog Buster for money; yes, of course he does.

"His secret cronies are people like that man Skelly who's infinitely more of a brute than any dog he murders. Skelly also does rat-catching, as a side line, and he lives in a shack in the woods at the head of the lake. I saw Caspar there last Sunday when I was out for a ramble. They were fighting ferrets and rats for money, putting a ferret into a cage against a rat and betting how long the fight would last, for, of course, the ferret couldn't see in the daylight. There was a riff-raff crowd gambling on the 'sport.' No, they didn't see me."

"You shouldn't go tramping about such a neighborhood alone," said Morney. "Then I may take it that you're not engaged to young Mr. Hammersley? Forgive the question, but I thought perhaps there was at least an understanding."

"How could a child like myself be engaged to any one, Mr. Morney? You know I'm too young and ignorant to understand anything of that nature. I'm such a kid that Caspar Hammersley even tells me war stories about himself—oh, beautiful fairy tales."

Morney knocked out his pipe. "I thought he might be beginning to realize, like myself, that——" Morney tugged at his collar while she picked up a leaf and, with bent head, began to pull it to pieces. "I don't think he likes my knowing you, any more than your father does."

"Oh," she said, and threw away the leaf. "Well, dad knows we see each other, otherwise I wouldn't be here. I might come without his permission, but not without his knowledge; there's a difference, to my mind. I told him we were friends, and that I didn't intend to let anything that had happened interfere with that fact; that I had my own opinion of what you call the Edinburgh epi-

sode—which gives me the opportunity of reminding you that I haven't heard the rest of the story."

"Perhaps Caspar Hammersley isn't the only one that tells you fairy tales." He stirred uncomfortably. "Where did I leave off?"

"You had become engaged in record time and written the glad news to your father who was down in South America on business. He wished you to marry somebody who had money and position but whom you didn't love. You thought he wasn't really so keen on this particular person as on your marrying and settling down and that, once he had seen your fiancée, he couldn't help loving her. Yes, you told me all that; also that her name was Rose and that she looked like one. But you left a great many unsatisfactory gaps and gave me no real idea of her. There is more than one variety of rose—negroes, for instance. Was she tall or short, fat or lean, dark or fair?"

"Does it matter?" said Morney with a vague gesture. "I'm no hand at descriptions. I can only say she was like a Burne-Jones picture."

"But if I don't know anything about them? Was she anything like—like me?"

"Oh, no; she was a very beautiful woman—I mean, that is to say, that, although young—I mean——"

"Yes, I know exactly what you mean, Mr. Morney. Thank you so much."

"But you know I meant nothing of the sort. There are different kinds of beauty, the difference between a Watteau and Burne-Jones. You are one, she the other."

"You got out of that rather nicely," said Jill, wrinkling her rudimentary nose. "But I'll have to look up Watteau, to be sure. However, I'm considerably mollified. Your fiancée then was tall and slender with a long neck, brownish hair, and gray eyes? So much then for her appearance; I've a pretty good mental picture of her now. But how did you meet her and where did she live? And was she really English?"

"No, American; that's what helped to draw us together. As for our meeting——" Morney stirred again uncomfortably. "We weren't introduced. It was at the Trocadero; she had forgotten her purse, the management was skeptical, and I—well, that's how we came to meet. Then I received permission to call. She lived in a West Kensington flat with her only relative, a Miss Kitteridge who was a distant cousin or something by marriage. All her people were dead and she had come over before the war to study art in Paris, where Miss Kitteridge then had a flat."

He continued awkwardly. "I couldn't be away from the business long in my father's absence—he was to be gone several months—and I was all for getting married and making a honeymoon trip across. I succeeded in persuading Rose, but Miss Kitteridge wouldn't hear of it. Of course, Miss Kitteridge had looked me up and knew all about me, but she wanted to meet my father and she added that, in any case, we should wait a year or so. That didn't suit me at all; I always did things in a hurry, I was tremendously in love, and objections only made me the more determined to have my way. But Miss Kitteridge wouldn't budge an inch, and the upshot was that Rose and I decided to elope, get married in Scotland, and take the slow Glasgow boat."

"But why Scotland? Wouldn't London have done?"

He eyed her attentively a moment. "You need special licenses and things, and Rose wanted to avoid a scene with Miss Kitteridge or any possibility of her interfering. She wasn't yet twenty-one and Miss Kitteridge was a sort of guardian with enough legal power to stop the marriage.

"Well, we eloped successfully—and it wasn't until we were in Edinburgh that I discovered we couldn't get married for three weeks. Why? Because the law is that you have to be resident that length of time. So I saw only one thing to do—pretend we had been resident the legal time. I got two of the hotel employees to act as witnesses and to swear that we had fulfilled all the legal requirements.

"Yes, subornation of perjury. Then on our way to the church a detective arrested us; I don't know how the authorities got on to it, but they had lost no time. The rest you know; I was arraigned in the sheriff's court and sent to prison for two months, while the hotel employees got a month each. There had been too much of that sort of thing going on, and they meant to make an example of us. I explained, of course, that Rose had no choice but to do as I advised and that she had no real responsibility in the matter; so she was let off with a reprimand."

CHAPTER XVIII.

There was a long silence, Jill busily engaged in reading between the lines of the strange story. Of course Rose had been hopelessly compromised and he had given his honor to save hers.

"It was awful to send you to jail!" she exclaimed hotly.

He shrugged. "The sheriff had no alternative. I took a chance, got caught, and deserved what was coming to me. I was more sorry for the hotel employees, and I've tried to square it with them. They were good fellows and didn't help simply for the money in it. If I'd sought my father's influence, I might have fixed things—but Edinburgh isn't New York; and I had to try and keep the whole thing as dark as possible. It wouldn't matter to my father how it had happened, it would be enough that I'd disgraced the name and landed in jail, as he had predicted more than once. And it would have prejudiced him unalterably against Rose; that was my main fear. I knew him well enough to know that he would hold her in some way responsible.

"If it were known that I was the son of what they would be sure to call the Yankee Chemical King the papers naturally would give it a spread; but I saw no reason why it need have a lot of publicity or that my father should know anything about it. I could do my two months in the second division and he would think it a honeymoon trip. So, although my name was known, of course, I managed to keep the family out of it; the papers gave it only a small paragraph, and I was described simply as an ex-American army man. If the authorities knew all about me—and perhaps they did—they acted very decently and the press, too. So I don't know how my father first heard of it or Mr. Hammersley, either."

"It was Caspar," said Jill. "He said he saw it in an English paper." And she related the account he had given.

"Oh," said Morney slowly. "That's funny; I'm sure it wasn't in any English paper. My father wouldn't say where he first heard of it." His eyes became speculative.

She was watching him intently. "Are you sure that you and Caspar Hammersley weren't acquainted before you came here? I've thought sometimes—I surprised him looking at you so—so queerly, that Sunday."

"I never set eyes on him until that day here by the lake."

"Well, I should like to see that newspaper account; even if it was garbled, it doesn't excuse him from not knowing the real facts, for he said he made an investigation. But about your fiancée—you are still engaged?"

He shook his head. "You see on the day of my arrest I got a cable from Buenos Aires—my father's answer to the news of my engagement and the intimation that I meant to bring my bride home with me. He said that I could bring her to a home of my own; that under no circumstances would he sanction my marriage to any one but the person he had selected and that if I persisted in any other course he would cut me off with the proverbial penny. It was an expensive cable, and that's an expurgated account. He had gone away up in the air, broken the altitude record which, for him, was considerable. My letter had taken some time to reach him, and he was afraid I was married; if so, I could consider myself disinherited."

"And so the engagement was broken?"

He nodded, a knot of pain between his eyes. "It made a difference, for it was quite clear that nothing on earth would ever reconcile him to the match. It meant paddling our own canoe."

"And you were—afraid?"

"Afraid?" Morney laughed as he had laughed that morning in the bloodstained wheat fields when the guns were cutting their human swathes and his chum was killed at his side. "I would have paddled for her with bleeding stumps on a one-log raft through hell's hurricane. God knows that, and she knew it, too. But it was her right to break the engagement."

"Right! Does real love ever speak of rights? And she left you—left you to bear it all alone? Oh, the shame of it! You gave your honor to save hers and that was her return! If she had had a spark of, not even love but common decency—why, she never loved you! She could have never loved anything but herself and your money."

"It's possible," he agreed with a faint, self-derisive smile. "Money may not be everything, but some people aren't much of a bargain without it; I'm in that class, and I was a fool to think that she ever cared for me as I cared for her. But the worst of it was she seemed to think I had deceived her willfully, that I should have told her

my father never would consent; otherwise she wouldn't have become engaged, much less eloped. It was no use for me to explain that I never believed he would go to such lengths and that, in any case, I thought the paternal purse well lost if I won her and that I wasn't a pensioner on his bounty. So you see there was her side of it."

"Yes, I see," said Jill dryly. "And what became of her?"

"I don't know. Of course all this happened last June, and I never saw or heard of her again. After I had served my sentence I returned to London, still hoping she would change her mind. But I couldn't find any trace of her or Miss Kitteridge; their flat was occupied by another tenant and nobody seemed to know where they had gone.

"In the meantime, my father had learned what had happened, first the garbled version you heard and, later, the true facts. When he found I wasn't actually married he took a more lenient view of the matter and advised me to remain for a time in England while he saw to it that it was kept out of the papers here.

"This suited me, for I was trying to find trace of Rose; yes, I was still a lovesick fool, but I couldn't help it. I spent the winter knocking around without result and, in fact, didn't return here until last month. My father was quite ready to forgive everything, on condition that I marry the person of his choice, and—well, that's how I came here."

Hamlet, who had been sleeping with one eye open and regarding them in an indulgent, paternal manner, now arose with a growl as a soft footfall sounded on the carpet of pine needles and a man entered the little glade. He had a black toothbrush mustache, gimlet eyes, and the look of one who believed in the golden rule, "do others, as they would do you, and do them first." Morney recognized him as Stoll of the local detective force.

It is impossible to say how long the plain-clothes man had been lurking in the background or how much he had heard of Morney's story but, at all events, his appearance could not have been timed better had he owned an eye for dramatic effect; it was precisely as if the action were taking place on the stage and he had answered his cue.

"Excuse me," he said, perfunctorily tipping his sunburned straw hat at Jill and then settling it more firmly over one eye. "Sorry to butt in, but I want a word with you, Mr. Morney."

Morney looked up from his seat on the fallen tree. "Well, you may have it."

"Not here," said Stoll. He glanced at Jill and she arose.

"There's no necessity for you to go, Miss Rutherford," said Morney. "Now, Mr. Stoll, perhaps you'll explain this intrusion."

"You've gotta come down to the house, Mr. Morney; the chief wants to see you."

"Indeed. You'll have to be more explicit."

"All right," snapped the detective. "It's about the former Rose Tredegar. You see we've learned she was an old flame of yours and that she threw you over for Dynevor."

Jill Rutherford caught her breath sharply, yet had Morney been watching her he might have seen that the revelation had not taken her wholly by surprise; indeed, her expression was that of one who has had startling confirmation of something considered most unpleasantly possible.

Morney stood rigid, staring at the detective. "R—Rose Tredegar!" he stammered at length. "Do you mean to say Mrs. Dynevor—but that's ridiculous! It's simply impossible! Things—things don't happen like that."

Stoll looked at him as one looks at an admirable actor; and Morney suddenly stepped forward with clenched hands. "You think, if this preposterous thing is actually true, that I knew? You think that I——"

Stoll had stepped back nimbly, a hand on his hip pocket. "No didoes now! You'd better come quiet, if you don't want the nippers."

Morney shrugged and turned to the girl. "It seems the story is finished and you know now what became of Rose. But you don't believe that I knew?"

"Need you ask that?" She put out her hands. "I believe you—always!"

CHAPTER XIX.

In the back room of the station house a reception committee awaited Morney; it was nominally presided over by Chief Hook, a scalded-looking person with Stoll's air of possessing an unflattering opinion of mankind. Amos Hammersley and his son were the other members and they made no attempt to hide their elation at the turn of events.

"I guess, young man," said Hook grimly, "there's something you sort of overlooked at the inquest, something that's rather important. You were supposed to be a stranger to everybody, and now it turns out that you and Mrs. Dynevor were once engaged to be married. Can you explain why you forgot to mention that fact?"

"Yes. But first of all I'd like to know when these two gentlemen became members of the police department."

"Mr. Hammersley and his son are witnesses and have a right here," snapped Hook. "You answer my question."

"The answer is obvious; I didn't know Mrs. Dynevor's identity or that her maiden name was Rose Tredegar—and I don't know it now. I'll need more than your word for it."

"Yeh? Well, I'll need more than yours for a lot of things, if it comes to that. Look here!" And Hook suddenly whipped out a cabinet photograph and held it before Morney's eyes. "Know her, eh?"

Had Morney sought evasion his expression alone would have betrayed him. "Yes," he said almost inaudibly. "That is Miss Tredegar, my former fiancée."

"And the second Mrs. Dynevor," added Hook grimly. "I needn't tell you that. D'you expect me to believe you wouldn't know the girl you was engaged to less than a year ago? You saw her the night she was killed——"

"And how?" demanded Morney. "You know very well the sort of injuries she received, that it would have been impossible to recognize her and that even Doctor Dicksee only knew her by her clothes."

"You saw her before that—a good many times, I guess," put in Amos Hammersley. "And if you were able to time the car, like you swore, you were able to see who was driving it. You can't have it both ways."

"Look here," added Hook, "you might as well come across and admit the truth; we'll get it anyway, and we know a lot more than you think. This stallin' game'll only make it harder for you."

"That doesn't work with me," replied Morney. "I've nothing to admit and you needn't try any sweating business. You've got nothing to hold me on, and I refuse to talk."

"Don't you tell me what I got or ain't got," barked Hook. "I got enough to hold you on suspicion for the murder of James Dynevor! You gotta whole lot of explainin' to do, and I ain't begging you to do it, neither; it's no buttons off my coat. But you'll talk, all right, or quickstep to the cooler."

It was here that the sheriff arrived, plainly to the disapproval of the reception committee. It did not require the evidence of the locked door, or the secrecy that attended Stoll's movements, to confirm Morney's belief that it had been intended to extort some sort of confession from him, however irregular the method. Stoll, against his orders and wishes, had been forced to reveal the nature of his mission in the presence of Jill, and he had not counted on her acting as she had. It would have surprised him had he known that she possessed a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the local political situation and that she wasn't blind to the possibility of Morney being employed as a pawn in the game.

She suspected that this move had been made without the sheriff's knowledge and she lost no time telephoning his office, only to learn that he had gone home and that Smith was off duty. Her suspicions were verified when she got Scott on the wire at his home; he knew nothing of the matter and had promptly hurried down to headquarters. His unexpected arrival precipitated a scene that was made none the less interesting by the fact that none said openly what he thought; they were all old campaigners and versed in the giving and receiving of such sly knocks.

"I only got this information after you'd gone," explained Hook, "and, of course, I acted on it at once. He says he didn't know who Mrs. Dynevor was, but he's gotta show me. You'll admit that this makes the case look a bit different."

It was apparent that the news was an unwelcome surprise to the sheriff, and he looked rather askance at Morney. "How did you learn of it?" he asked Hook.

Amos Hammersley replied. "This fellow," he said, pointing the menacing finger at Morney, "may have fooled you, but he never fooled me. He has been the logical answer from the first. Ain't he an expert chemist? Ain't he the only one that knew all about nicotine? It don't matter how I learned that the woman he eloped with in London was the one that my cousin married; I've had a private agency looking him up and that's enough. I only learned it to-day."

"What elopement?" interrupted the sheriff. "There seems to be a whole lot I don't know. And what proof have you that the woman was Mrs. Dynevor?"

"There ain't any question of that," retorted Hammersley, tossing over the photograph. "You know it's her, don't you? Her name was Rose Tredegar, and he admits it's the same. I've got all the proof in the world; she came over here last July, and my cousin couldn't have known her more than a coupla weeks. It's what I always said; he fell for her looks, and she was slick enough to hold out for a marriage license. He was an infatuated old fool and knew nothing about her relations with this fellow. I say he was still in love with her and that he put Dynevor away through jealousy; maybe it was a cooked job between them and she was going to marry him after she'd copped the estate."

Morney laughed though his eyes were burning. "And I suppose that's why I told about the stuff in that glass? After successfully committing the crime——"

"Yes, you thought that a mighty slick move," cried Hammersley. "You removed the stuff to protect yourself and so that murder wouldn't be suspected; that was your *real* reason for keeping quiet. But then I got you fired, I showed you up, and you planned to get square. You saw you would be able to throw suspicion on me and that, even if you didn't succeed, some of the dirt would stick and queer me at the polls. You saw that by coming forward and telling about the stuff it would be the best way of proving how innocent you were. You ain't the first person that's tried to be too slick or found that in trying to frame somebody else you've only given yourself away!"

Morney laughed again, then turned to Scott who was mopping his pink cheeks. "I admit that my former fiancée and the second Mrs. Dynevor must have been one and the same, but I deny being aware of the fact before Mr. Stoll informed me. Of course, all the rest is piffle. Why, to take only one fact, Mr. Caspar Hammersley knows where I was on the evening of the crime; I hardly think he can have forgotten."

Caspar reddened angrily. "There was plenty of time after I saw you, or Miss Rutherford passed you on the road, for you to have gone to the Dynevors."

"That may be," replied Morney, "but you won't find there was time for me to have got back again."

This was indisputable. Jill Rutherford had not left the Dynevors until a quarter past six and, at shortly after seven, Doctor Dicksee had also seen Morney. It was fully a mile from where the car had been wrecked to the Dynevor home. With all the will in the world nobody on foot could have accomplished so much in the time; it might be possible if one had regard only for speed, but certainly impossible if any allowance were made for the time spent in the house and in avoiding notice. Besides, there was also Morney's meeting with Skelly.

"That's all right, too," said Hook, "but I ain't asleep, you know. You'd plenty of time to go to the Dynevors before you ever showed up at the lake. You left Mrs. Flannery's at two o'clock, and young Mr. Hammersley saw you at about five-thirty; that's three hours and a half. What did you do all that time? Describe your movements after leaving your boarding house."

"I walked up Bond Street and then cut into the turnpike by way of Merton Avenue. When I came to the bridge I went into the woods, to cut a fishing pole, and then went down to the lake. I was there about two hours."

"You were not—not in our property!" exclaimed Caspar. "I was down there at four o'clock and you weren't there."

"I was there at four o'clock. I was there, under that tree, from half past three."

"And I say you weren't!" retorted Caspar.

"Did you happen to meet anybody in the woods, anybody who could prove you were there?" demanded Hook grimly.

"I met a stray dog—and if he could talk he would at least tell the truth. No, I saw nobody; the woods don't appear to be densely populated. Do you suggest that I entered the Dynevor home in broad daylight and that nobody saw me? And on the previous night I burglared the place and stole the nicotine? But then Mrs. Flannery will tell you that I didn't leave my room after seven o'clock."

"There's nothing to prove that the stuff was stolen that night," retorted Hook. "It could have been taken at the time Mr. Dynevor was croaked. And he'd no patent on the stuff; I guess you knew as much about makin' it as he did—mebbe more. You might have come down here with some."

Morney yawned. "I might have done a

whole lot of things, but there's a slight difference between that and what I actually did do. If you've any real evidence connecting me with the death of Mr. Dynevor, produce it. I'm late as it is for supper."

"You'll have your supper right here in the cooler," declared Hook, "and you'll stay there while we're sifting your case to the bottom. I've got more'n enough real evidence to hold you on suspicion, and you ain't gonna have the chance of skippin' out. You ain't explained where you was that day —not by a jugful. I guess young Mr. Hammersley's word's as good as yours."

Morney turned to the sheriff, but that gentleman deftly avoided his eyes. "It's unfortunate, but, of course, you see that the chief is entirely within his rights and has, in fact—er—no alternative. Of course, you aren't under arrest, merely held while your statements are being investigated. I'm sorry, but you see——"

"Never more clearly," said Morney with a smile. "It's a great little town."

"He's a cool hand," pronounced Hook when Morney had gone, "and, of course, we ain't had time to do more'n gather him in. He's a slick one, but we'll hang it on him all right. There ain't a question that Mrs. Dynevor met him on the sly; and mebbe if we gave that guy Tomlinson a good stiff sweatin' he'd remember more'n he says."

Stoll spoke up. "He was tellin' the tale to Miss Rutherford and I listened in. He admitted that even after being thrown down and gettin' his stretch he was so much in love that he stayed over there tryin' to find her. Whatever else was bull con I guess that was true enough and there ain't a doubt but that he followed her back here. He admitted, too, that his old man would have forgiven everything if he'd married some girl he'd picked out for him. And what's the real reason he wouldn't? Because he was still nuts over this other one."

CHAPTER XX.

The news of Morney's arrest came on the town like a thunderclap, although, as is always the case, there were those who claimed to have predicted it from the first. The sheriff, however, aspired to no such prescience and was among the loudest in his expressions of astonishment. He was incensed, too, the anger and disappointment of one who finds a tool turn in his hand. That valuable political weapon—the suspicion of Hammersley's guilt—was, in fact, proving something of a boomerang; for Hammersley and his followers were beginning to hint pretty openly that these grand-stand reformers had not scrupled to employ methods quite as bad as any they professed to condemn.

"They're as much as saying," declared Scott to Quiller, "that we knew all this. That fellow Morney has let us down bad; he should at least have told us about his relations with Mrs. Dynevor."

"But," replied the coroner, "do you believe then in his guilt?"

Now, there was this difference between Quiller and Scott; the former was something of a fanatic, the latter everything of a politician. Whatever his faults none could accuse the coroner of seeking the spoils of office or exploiting his cause for personal gain.

He had become a rabid reformer, and for this there was reason, inasmuch as he had seen an only and beloved son ruined by the local brothels and ginmills. The boy's disgraceful death hastened the mother's and Quiller emerged from the double bereavement with the virus of reformation in his blood and an abiding hatred of Amos Hammersley. It would have been useless to suggest that his son, given such tendencies, would have indulged them anywhere and that he himself, and not any particular person or place, was to blame. To Quiller it was enough that under the Hammersley régime temptation to such license was brought practically to one's door.

Scott, on the other hand, cared little what banner he marched under so long as it bore the motto "Excelsior;" nor were the heights he aimed at of a purely moral nature. He was intensely ambitious, though successfully concealing the fact, and he had aligned himself with Quiller and the so-called Purity League simply through expediency, notwithstanding the fact that once he had been a "Hammersley man" and had even secured his first political footing through that influence.

He had had the foresight to anticipate the doom of the old régime, the caution not to commit himself too deeply to the Hammersley interests, the ability to impress Quiller and the like with the sincerity and fervor of his attachment to their cause. Hammersley, the boss, was going; might not he, Scott, take his place in another guise?

All that the tottering Hammersley needed to send him to political oblivion was a good push; and that push appeared to have arrived when Dynevor died.

But now? Rather than going down under the suspicion that he was guilty of his cousin's death, public reaction might be such as to return him triumphantly to power. In brief, Scott saw that it might even become necessary to change his coat again, and that, at least, it behooved the prudent to be prepared for such an eventuality as the repeal of the prohibition law. At all events it was no longer sound tactics, in the light of this startling development, to pose as an inveterate foe of Amos Hammersley.

"The whole case looks very bad against Morney, just about as bad as it can be," he said in answer to Quiller's question. "There seems to be no escaping the conviction that we were willfully deceived and that he must have known of Mrs. Dynevor's identity. When you come right down to it, there's nothing but his bare word for everything. Why, how do we even know that Hammersley ever tried to bribe him? There's the fact that he refused to make a charge. All the facts certainly appear to warrant Hammersley's assertion—that, out of revenge, he came forward with that evidence; a bold and cunning move based on his knowledge of our opposition to Hammersley."

Quiller chose to believe nothing of all this and said so in his downright fashion. "If there's any revengeful plot, it's Hammersley's. What's the chief item against Morney? Merely the word of Caspar Hammersley—and, in my opinion, it's worth even less than his father's."

Scott shook his head. "That's only a strand in the rope, and they're confident of digging up the rest. I guess we may as well admit that we've been the victims as well as Hammersley. I told him as much, too; nothing like owning up to a mistake, fair and square, even to a political foe."

"Then I hope you spoke for yourself alone," snapped the coroner. "I don't change my convictions on such evidence."

"Of course," said Potts, when he learned of the sheriff's attitude. "The tool has failed and is now thrown aside. Precisely what I warned him. But I didn't expect anything so bad as this." Not for a moment did he admit the possibility of Morney's guilt. "Even supposing he knew of Mrs. Dynevor's identity would that be a crime?" he said to Smith.

"It's not only the knowing, but the hiding of it."

"There could be very good reason for that," retorted the house physician. "He might have realized, if it were known, how bad it would make things look against him. It's always the innocent who make such mistakes. But I don't believe he knew; his word's good enough for me. Surely you don't think for a moment that they've got the right man?"

"Well, I ain't exactly sayin' that, but it looks pretty bad."

Potts, profoundly troubled, walked the floor of his office. "Is that the best you can say?" And he shot a look of exasperation, not unmixed with suspicion, at the placid bulk in the armchair. "Are you another Scott?"

"No, but I ain't another Quiller, either," retorted the ponderous one. "And it was you who said we wasn't to let our feelings against Hammersley get the best of us. I'm lookin' at everything in a calm judicial light."

"And that's all you're doing—looking! You've been looking since Dynevor died. And you'll still be looking when they send an innocent man to the chair!"

"How do you know he's innocent?" retorted Smith injuredly. "You'd think he was your own brother!"

"He saved my brother's life. He's my friend, and I believe in him. He's as innocent as I am!"

"Well, he didn't save my brother's life. And if he saved your brother's life, it don't argue that he didn't take Dynevor's."

"And I thought you were a friend of his!" commented Potts. "You are like all the rest, Smith. Of course we're equal in the eyes of the law, but, if Morney hadn't been disinherited, you'd all be falling over one another trying to help him. One law for the rich and another for the poor. They've nothing to hold him on, but they'll keep him there, on one pretext or another, while they try to sweat something out of him."

"Friendship's got no business in my trade," said Smith, "and it wouldn't matter if he was my own brother or if every hair in his head was strung with diamonds. No, sir. I'm real sorry for him, so far as that goes, as I am for any man that lets a

woman ruin him. The case looks mighty bad, doc, and they'll hang it on him as sure as shootin'. If you consider all the facts in a calm judicial light——"

"To the devil with your calm judicial light," said Potts. "All that the facts need is a *real* detective. You know blamed well he isn't the answer, but you're satisfied with it because you're incapable of finding the right one. And, no doubt, like Scott, you now see it's the wise game to conciliate Amos Hammersley."

Like many fat people Smith had an admirable temper, his blubber serving as a buffer between his nerves and such a jar as Potts had delivered. He merely blinked and replied equably, "Them is hard words, but I ain't going to get mad, because I know you don't mean 'em. I never pretended to be no Sherlock Holmes, but I do know when a case is pretty near cut and dried. Of course, the chief has more up his sleeve than he's showin'. If you'd only look at the facts in a calm——"

"Yes, I understand. I was a fool to expect any help from you. But I'll get it somewhere; the Lord knows I'm not rich, but I'll get the best lawyer in the State."

"He couldn't do nothing. Save your money, doc, and be prepared for the worst. Of course, I know how you feel; you ain't never cared very much for nobody, and then along comes a guy you really know nothin' about; but because he's saved your brother's life——"

"Oh, get out!" And Potts pointed to the door. "If you won't give your help you can keep the rest. I know now why you got the nickname 'original;' you're the original ass and no mistake."

CHAPTER XXI.

The following day Jill Rutherford, heedless of gossip, paid a visit to the jail. She was determined to see Morney and, in spite of all obstacles, had her way.

He looked as if he had spent a sleepless night, but still wore his cheerful smile. He was unfeignedly glad to see her, deeply impressed by the faith that prompted her action, but intimated that for her own sake he could not approve of it. She swept aside his objections. "Why shouldn't I come? It's a poor friend that wouldn't."

"A mighty good friend that would, Miss Rutherford. I needn't try to hide from you or myself that things don't look too pleasant. You and Doctor Potts—he was here early this morning. A fine fellow and a better friend."

She wanted to know all that had happened and he explained briefly. "It's simply staggering that Mrs. Dynevor should turn out to be Rose Tredegar; I can't get over it," he continued. "Yet one has to believe the truth. Think of me seeing her the night of her death and never suspecting! And yet why should I? Her own mother wouldn't have been able to recognize her. They say, of course, that I applied for a position down here so as to be near her; but I hadn't the slightest idea where she was or that she was even married. I can't make them believe that."

"When you described her and said her name was Rose I began to suspect the truth, although it seemed so improbable," said Jill. "Yes, it's an amazing conspiracy of circumstances; but to me your ignorance of her identity is less astonishing than Mr. Hammersley's. How did he happen to learn the truth only now? Did he explain that?"

"He said it was through a private detective agency. Of course we had to give our right names when applying for the marriage license."

"Yes, that's just it. And don't you suppose, when he knew all about your arrest, he also knew her name?"

"Yes, but would he have any reason to connect her with Mrs. Dynevor—any more reason than I had? He knew nothing about his cousin's marriage; very likely didn't even know her maiden name. If he had known from the first, why keep silent until now? There would be no logical reason. This trump card against me was worth as much then as now."

"That's true," she admitted, "and yet I'm not satisfied. I feel there's something that hasn't been explained. That private agency must be uncommonly capable to have worked so quickly and surely. First Mr. Hammersley, to suit his own ends, gives a garbled account of your arrest; and then, also to suit his own ends, gives the true version. His information seems very convenient—like his son's visit to the lake at four o'clock."

"If he was there at that time he couldn't have helped seeing me," said Morney. He seemed less concerned with the whole situation than with the effect upon his father. "I

can imagine my father's face when he sees this morning's papers," he went on. "From subornation of perjury to murder; I'm getting on—doing nobly by the family name."

"But he can't say this time that you were in any way to blame; and, of course, he must know you're innocent and come hotfoot to the rescue. In a case of real trouble like this he simply can't stand aside. This ordeal may be the means of showing him how trivial your quarrel was and how unreasonable his attitude. But, after all, he was right—I mean about your marriage."

"Yes, but his objection wasn't based on any knowledge."

"Nevertheless——" She shrugged. "It simply couldn't have turned out a success. Don't you see that now?"

"I saw it long ago," he replied quietly. "They claim I was still in love with her; their whole case rests on that. But I wasn't; if I had been I wouldn't have left England, for I thought she was still there. I don't mean to say that her memory hasn't tortured me, but I succeeded in reaching the point where I fully realized that she never really cared for me. I learned that before I came home."

She had an idea how the knowledge had been acquired, that he had learned more concerning Rose Tredegar than he cared to say. She had her own opinion of that elopement; certain details had seemed improbable enough before she knew the identity of the woman. She could not imagine the experienced and self-sufficient Mrs. Dynevor being younger than twenty-one or under the legal guardianship of any one.

"I can't understand about that other woman, Miss Kitteridge," she said. "Mrs. Dynevor had no relatives, so she couldn't have been a cousin."

"Apparently not," said Morney; and he went on to speak of his father. He, Morney, had not appealed for help, nor would he do so. He offered no criticism but appeared to think it not unlikely that his parent would decline to be involved in the matter.

Returning home from this visit Jill heard Amos Hammersley with her father in the room known as the museum, heard him as she entered the study. They had not heard her, and she paused at the sound of Morney's name. Hammersley was trumpeting his victory; his virtue had been vindicated and what a fine witness Morney would now make when the fight for the Dynevor estate came off in the civil court, preparations for which were now going forward. "And by that time, Sam, you'll have convinced Miss Jill that she heard the town clock striking in her fuzzy imagination."

Her father's voice came strained and unnatural. "There's no use having that all over again, Amos; I told you where I'd drawn the line."

Hammersley laughed. "And now I'm in a position to tell *you* something. You thought I was on the skids and that I couldn't afford to carry out what I said? Well, that's right, too, but now things have changed a bit; the old lion ain't dead, after all, and already the jackals are making up to him. This dirty plot to oust me by insinuatin' that I killed Dynevor has failed.

"I'm comin' back to power, Sam; comin' stronger than ever and leadin' the good old times gently by the hand. They want me back; the public, if it makes mistakes, knows how to apologize handsomely, and this inside trick that was to put me in the discard has been the very best thing that could have happened. It couldn't have worked better, if I'd staged it myself. I've been wronged and old *pro bono publico* is gonna make it right. Folks, too, have had their fill of fanatics like Quiller, hypocrites like Scott, and are longing for the good old days.

"I don't need your help, Sam, and I don't forget how you always grudged it. I don't need your daughter's evidence, either; with Morney shown up like he is, I'll win hands down without it. But I'm gonna show you who's boss, something you seem to have forgot. That girl of yours is gonna take back what she said at the inquest or I'm gonna do like I told you. You hear me, Sam? Well, you got just one week to make up your mind—and you can paste that where it'll do the most good!"

Hearing a step on the stair, Jill quietly entered the corridor. Caspar Hammersley was ascending from the entrance hall; from his position it would have been impossible for him to have seen her leave the study.

"Oh," she said, looking over the balustrade, "we seem to keep a very open house. I didn't hear you ring."

He shrugged. "I knew my father was here."

"Oh, is he? I'm just home."

"Yes, and I know where you've been. What do you think people will say?"

"I'm sure I don't know nor care, Mr. Hammersley."

"Mr. Hammersley, eh? Since when has it become that?"

"It doesn't matter; but it's that now and in the future. And in the future you will kindly ring and announce yourself like any other visitor."

He surveyed her with anger and some amusement. "We're growing up and putting on airs, eh? Come, don't make yourself ridiculous, Jill; if you're no longer a kid, you shouldn't act like one. We were good enough friends until this fellow Morney—— Yes, he has everything to do with it! And you're acting like a condemned fool."

His father's voice summoned him, and he flung into the room, she following. "Where do you think she's been?" he exclaimed. "Down in the jail with that fellow!"

"Fine!" said Amos Hammersley. "Trust her always to do something to help the family." He looked suspiciously at Rutherford to whom his daughter's visit had been no secret. "You hear this, Sam?"

"My father has nothing to do with it," said Jill, "and you considerably less, Mr. Hammersley. I'm old and able enough to choose my friends."

"I wish you were my daughter for five minutes," said Hammersley. "Friends—with that blackguard and murderer! But I suppose in your exalted opinion he's innocent? What pretty tale has he been telling you now?"

"None half so pretty as your son's." And she turned on the startled Caspar. "You weren't near the lake at four o'clock that day."

"I was and I can prove it!"

"You weren't and you can't. You were in Skelly's shack from three till half past four."

He lost color. "I—I wasn't! I can get Skelly to prove it."

"Yes, and perhaps a servant or two to say you were at home. But my word is as good as any you can buy. Shall I tell you what you were doing at the shack? No doubt your father knows, but it may interest people like Mr. Quiller."

Hammersley closed the door, then looked at his son. That look convinced Jill that at least in this instance he was sincere; it was beyond his histrionic powers to assume it. "Is this true?" he demanded of Caspar. "Were you there at that time, or weren't you? Were you there at all?"

"She knows nothing about it. She never saw me."

"I know enough." And Jill nodded her head complacently. "And I saw you that Sunday, too, when you were fighting ferrets."

This upset him. "Little sneak!" Then defiantly, "Well, what if I was there? I left before four o'clock and Skelly can prove it. You'll need more than your word."

"Possibly," she agreed. "But I'll be pleased to tell *all* I know."

CHAPTER XXII.

Morney was released the following evening, not long after the arrival of his father, who was accompanied by the best criminal legal talent in the State. Chief Hook considered he had been treated unfairly; why had he been given to understand that George T. Morney wouldn't stir a finger to help his son?

And not only had he been unable to unearth anything that would warrant holding his prisoner longer, but his most telling point had been wiped out by the hand that made it, Caspar Hammersley admitting that he had been mistaken. His explanation was obscure; it involved an unreliable watch, and seemingly equally unreliable facts, but at all events he now stated that it was five, not four o'clock, when he visited the lake. He came forward and made this correction out of a spirit of justice. Could an honest man act otherwise?

Thus the case against Morney stood precisely where it had; none could prove he was in the Hammersley grounds from three-thirty to five—patently the only time when he could have fixed the fatal dose for Dynevor—and none could prove he wasn't. It was equally possible that he could have entered the Dynevor home during those hours and that none had observed him or remembered seeing him in the neighborhood. Quite probable also that the bottle he claimed to have been stolen was destroyed by himself before his assault which had been the deed of an ordinary footpad.

His effects had been searched and Stoll thought he had made a find; but the chemicals were such as any one in Morney's profession would possess, and he explained blandly that nicotine, treated with a drop of the formaldehyde solution and then with

a drop of nitric acid, gives a rose-red coloration and that he had intended applying this test to the dregs of the tumbler. There was nothing to show that he had ever possessed or prepared the poison. Likewise nothing to show, as alleged, that Mrs. Dynevor had met him in New York or elsewhere.

Tomlinson, Mrs. Bowles, and the other servants had been reëxamined, and the butler, sweated by Hook in his best manner, was the only one that parted with any additional information. He admitted that on one occasion, shortly prior to the tragedy, Mrs. Dynevor had gone out, after pleading a headache and retiring for the night, unknown to her husband. He, Tomlinson, only learned this by overhearing something of the resultant row. Husband and wife occupied different rooms and Dynevor had only discovered the escapade by chance.

Why hadn't he, Tomlinson, revealed this at the inquest? Well, he wasn't asked, and it wasn't his business to volunteer anything that would add to the ugly things that were being said about Mrs. Dynevor. Yes, it was possible that she might have gone out on more than one occasion—she had her own key—but he had no knowledge of the fact.

Hook wasn't done with Tomlinson nor, by any means, with Morney; if he let the latter go, it wasn't through any personal conviction of his innocence, but merely that he now had to conform strictly to legal requirements. He made no secret, though, of the fact that he still hoped to unearth evidence that would earn an indictment which all George T. Morney's money and influence could not prevent. And he damned Caspar Hammersley.

Amos Hammersley also damned his son, and had a few oaths left for Jill Rutherford. One can coerce a man, but a rattle-brained spitfire? His victorious trumpeting had turned to a snarl; everything seemed to be going wrong again, the whole question of Dynevor's death reopened and Morney not only released but now backed by his father's millions; quite a different opponent from the poor and friendless black sheep. Hammersley, going by his own methods, knew what money could do.

He despised a bungler, forgetting how the attempted bribery of Morney had been bungled. But for that he also blamed his son; he it was who conveyed the false information concerning the real reason of Morney's disinheritance. So their relations had become strained, and it did not help matters when Caspar intimated that he needed money—not an unique condition.

"So do I," snapped his father. "So does everybody. And, like everybody, you can go find it. Try hard work for a change; you've never yet earned your salary."

Caspar ignored the advice, became importunate, and mentioned a sum that staggered father. It is to be believed that he knew little of Caspar's other life and cared less. "Good God!" he said, and looked at his son with new eyes.

Caspar was skeptical that the paternal purse was depleted and Hammersley swore again, this time copiously. He had lost more than the coin of John Barleycorn and his grip on the town; would-be "war brides" had swallowed a fortune, and practically all that stood between him and the poorhouse was the Dynevor estate. If Caspar had displayed a proper filial interest he would have known all this. Caspar intimated that there was such a thing as proper paternal interest; it wasn't his fault if always he had been kept on the fringe of affairs. As for gambling and all that, wasn't there father's example? And if father was really so hard up as he pretended, why not put the screws on Rutherford? An obvious proceedure.

Father swore for the third time and adduced the fable of the goose and golden eggs. Rutherford couldn't give what he hadn't, otherwise the obvious procedure would have been carried out long ago. Dynevor had crippled the business by insisting on withdrawing his capital. Of course that wasn't to be known publicly, any more than he wished his own financial condition to be known.

Caspar remained skeptical and compliments were passed.

Meanwhile, in the Flannery boarding house, another parent was reading the riot act to his offspring. It is possible that his son's peril caused Mr. Morney to realize how much he cared for him; and now, like any normal parent, when the immediate danger was over his sole emotion was an overwhelming desire to administer a hearty kick.

He was a granite-faced man with the son's fighting jaw, but not his eyes. It was only in his remarks to Chief Hook, whom he easily succeeded in making a personal enemy, that one might have glimpsed an af-

fection for his son; to the latter his blazing anger was occasioned solely by the notoriety to the family name. If he came hotfoot to the rescue, it was with no tears or slobberings; he said all that his son expected and more. He was still saying it, with variations, while Hamlet eyed him with somber disapproval and Morney inspected the worn carpet.

"Entirely your own fault, sir! Don't attempt to contradict me; I say it is! This woman in the case, a worthless character—don't attempt to interrupt me, sir. I know all about it. She made a fool of you, played you for the biggest sucker—I despise the word but it fits—that was ever hooked. Why, sir, a child could have seen her game—to compromise herself with you, reckoning on your gallant idiocy which you may call chivalry. An innocent-eyed money hunter, infinitely worse than the needy woman who frankly sells herself."

"She's dead, sir——"

"A year too late."

"You can tell me nothing I don't know, sir."

"Again too late. The slightest intelligent investigation would have shown you what she was. But you were no better than this man Dynevor, call your infatuation by any name you please. And for this woman you spurned a saintly character like Amelia Bowater; you rejected my offer and followed her here!"

"So my enemies say, sir. If you believe I knew she had become Mrs. Dynevor and lived here, you believe then in my guilt."

"Your reasoning is faulty as usual; I believe you a fool, but not a murderer. Say I considered that this particular crime postulates a certain cleverness on the part of the author that you don't possess. I can conceive you knocking Dynevor on the head in a jealous rage, but you would have been sure to bungle this adroit affair. And I admit you were never given to lying—or, at least, I've never caught you in one—so I must accept your word that you didn't follow the woman here. But, perhaps, you see that few others will believe you and that, though you've been released by the authorities, it doesn't follow by any means that you've established your innocence?"

"I fully realize that, sir. I regret not having made the family name fragrant. I acknowledge certain follies and consider I have learned a much-needed lesson."

"Very well; you will leave this primitive hole and return with me. Let the future atone for the past. You will find Miss Bowater——"

"No, sir, I will not; nor she me. In any case, I remain here."

"Damn!" said George T. Morney, and completed one of his noted ascensions.

"Amen," said his son when the dust had settled somewhat. "I intend to solve the mystery of Mr. Dynevor's death; I owe that to myself and the memory of his wife. She was not a murderess."

"So you're still thinking of that woman? You'll solve nothing with my money, sir; not a penny! You'll leave this infernal hole, and all these infernal people and meddle no more in this filthy mess. What! No? Very well; then go your own gait as usual and—and be damned to you, sir! It is beyond my comprehension where you get your infernal mulishness. Stay here then and wallow in the mire if it so pleases you; but don't come to me when you're in trouble again. Bah, sir!"

It was what Mrs. Flannery called a very decomposed old gentleman that stormed out of the house to his waiting limousine.

"And sure," added the Widow Flannery, admitting Jill Rutherford and Doctor Potts, who had called to offer felicitations on Morney's release, "they've had a grand row, and the old boy's disowned him all over again, the creature." Her trust in Morney extended to a three weeks' board bill.

"I have been superdisinherited," explained Morney. "My stay in the paternal bosom was brief. The Bowater delusion is still going strong, and he doesn't fancy this town."

"So I gathered," said Jill. "I've had the pleasure of meeting your father—while on my way in the car to call for Doctor Potts. He had tire trouble."

"Liver?" suggested Potts.

She shook her head. "I found him quite human. The footpump had gone out of commission, and I offered mine. We had a lovely chat while the chauffeur worked."

"Now, Lord save us!" said Morney.

"It's a wise son that knows all about his father," said Potts. "He should be ashamed of himself. And after his lecture on the heinousness of irregular meetings with strange females!"

"It was entirely decorous," said Jill. "You know I'm such a child. He thought I was

a summer visitor; he abominates the place and people and I agreed with him. I found him extremely nice. It's all in the way you take him."

"Rather it's all in the way you look," said Morney. "It seems I come honestly by my eyes for beautiful scenery. It's well to have a foot in the enemy's camp, and when I'm in trouble again, as he confidently predicts, I'll ask you to do the calling for help. And it's time I attempted to thank you for the help given. But what were Caspar Hammersley and Skelly doing at the shack that day?"

"I don't know," said Jill. "I never saw them."

"By Jupiter," said Potts, "here's somebody that could teach Smith something about his profession. You mean you bluffed him?"

"I suppose it amounted to that," she admitted. "But I never said I saw him; I merely accused him of being there. And I did actually see him that Sunday, you know. I believed he wasn't telling the truth and thought I'd try a chance shot. Whatever Skelly and he were doing it was enough to make Mr. Hammersley want to keep it quiet; so he made Caspar admit the truth rather than have me tell what I really didn't know. But I have an idea that the shack is used for storing whisky."

"I believe you've hit it," exclaimed Potts. "You remember, Morney, your telling how Skelly was drunk that day? He's an old henchman of Hammersley's. Of course there's been a secret trade in the stuff right along."

Mrs. Flannery burst into the room. "'Tis turrible news I've been just after havin'. Mr. Hammersley's dead!"

They stared at her. "What! How? The father?"

"Yes. I've just had it off the letter carrier. Some says it's appleplexy, some that he kilt himself——"

Morney, Potts, and Jill tore out to the latter's car, an unspoken question the property of all.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was assuredly a strange and grim coincidence that Amos Hammersley should die in the same manner as his cousin. Here were similar surrounding circumstances, the victim alone in his study and discovered by a servant; there was even a tumbler on the desk containing a small amount of whisky and soda. And he looked the same as Dynevor, bore the general appearance of having died from apoplexy. Doctor Dicksee had remarked how similar the cousins were in build; an apoplectic seizure might logically have been the end of both.

Morney felt as though he were back that night at the Dynevors and doing everything over again; here even was Doctor Dicksee, who had arrived on their heels, again emulating the proverbial duck in a thunderstorm. But instead of Tomlinson there was a grim-faced housekeeper. And there was Caspar Hammersley who sat and stared and was of no more practical help than Dicksee. Then Scott and Quiller arrived, followed by Hook and Stoll; and the latter couple looked at Morney as if to say: "Aha, you aren't out long before this happens."

Morney was examining the tumbler. "This has contained nicotine," he said.

"You surprise me," snarled Hook. "I guess this trick has been tried once too often."

At length the following facts were forthcoming: Hammersley had come home at six o'clock. His son had left the house at four o'clock and did not return until he learned of the tragedy. Hammersley entered the study where he generally went before dinner, which was to be at the customary hour of seven. The housekeeper, in the dining room across the hall, saw him enter. About five minutes later she heard a choking cry and the sound of a fall. She found Hammersley on the floor in convulsions, and he died in a few minutes, without speaking.

"Did you bring him the whisky and soda?" she was asked.

No, she knew nothing about it; she was aware that it was always in the house but didn't know where it came from. It wasn't under her charge.

"It was kept here," said Caspar; and he went, like one in a trance, to the large cellaret. It was unlocked and contained several siphons and some dozen bottles of brandy, whisky, and liqueur. All were corked and sealed but one, a bottle of whisky from which a small amount had been taken.

Potts tasted some of it and spat it out; Quiller, Dicksee, and Morney followed suit. There was no question that it was heavily impregnated with nicotine; all had learned enough about the poison to know that. The burning taste of the alcohol did not wholly obliterate the distinctive burning taste of

the nicotine, nor the odor of the one entirely kill the faint ethereal smell of the other.

"It is clear," said Quiller, "that in this and Mr. Dynevor's case they took a good strong drink, swallowed it at a gulp, and had it down before they had time to suspect anything wrong with it. The fact that Mr. Hammersley cried out and went into convulsions, while Mr. Dynevor died silently and almost instantly, may be accounted for by the fact that the dose in this instance was relatively weaker. But it has been shown that nicotine doesn't act the same in all cases.

"I think we don't require a post-mortem examination to convince us of the cause of death; it will only prove what we already know. Mr. Hammersley has met the same fate as his cousin and, if it were not for the former's death and what it taught us, this, too, might have passed for a case of apoplexy. The only question that remains is, was the poison self-administered?"

It was a large question; as in Dynevor's case, it might be either suicide or murder. Apparently it must be one or the other, and the most accommodating jury that ever sat could not have recourse to the old stand-by of misadventure; it wasn't Hammersley's daily custom to experiment with deadly poisons. An obvious explanation suggested itself—that he was actually responsible for his cousin's death and had stolen the nicotine; that he had killed himself through remorse or because he was afraid the truth would be discovered ultimately.

But if such were the case why go to the trouble of dosing a whole bottle of whisky? It all came back to that bottle; somebody might have tampered with it as they tampered with Dynevor's glass. Here were the same conditions, an open window and the servants in the back premises.

Caspar said the cellaret was seldom locked, and he admitted having free access to it. "So far as I know that bottle has always been in the house. All that stuff," designating the imposing array, "is part of our private cellar, what we had on hand before the law went into force."

"When was the last time you were at the cellaret?" asked Scott.

"To-day at noon. My father and I had a high ball before lunch. We finished what was in that decanter, and my father opened a new bottle; he was going to refill the decanter, but didn't."

"Why?"

"Well, we—we got talking about something, and I suppose he forgot."

"Was that the bottle your father opened?"

He supposed so; among so many similar bottles he had no reason to distinguish a particular one.

"I guess it don't matter where the bottle came from, first off," said Chief Hook. "It was doped here in the house, all right."

"How do you know?" said Quiller. "I think it matters a great deal where that particular bottle came from and every effort must be made to trace its history. It might have been tampered with, recorked and sealed, before it ever came here. Can you say positively," addressing Caspar, "that since the law went into effect there has been no addition to your father's private cellar?"

He hesitated and shot a furtive look at Jill who remained silent. Unless compelled by circumstances, she would keep her tacit agreement with Amos Hammersley, though he was now beyond caring what effect such a disclosure would have on his political fortunes. Nor did Morney or Potts say anything. But Caspar did; after that momentary hesitation he spoke freely. Apparently love of truth triumphed over filial regard for his father's reputation; perhaps he considered it advisable that it should be known where the fatal bottle might have come from, or he believed Jill wasn't to be trusted.

"There's a subcellar in Skelly's shack that's full of the stuff," he said. "Dynevor was supplied and many another. Yes, a secret trade." He himself had no active part in it, for his father never told him much about his affairs; but he knew at least that a motor boat and the hearse of a local undertaker was one of the lines of communication that had kept the West Pinelake speak-easies supplied. No, he didn't believe there had been any great fortune in it; he thought his father had done it more to oblige political friends. He, Caspar, had always been against this secret defiance of the law, but, of course, he couldn't say anything; a son can't betray his father.

All this was rather gratifying to Quiller and Scott, and they turned inquiring eyes on Chief Hook; that scalded gentleman and Stoll were regarding Caspar as if they considered his place in the animal kingdom something lower than the skunk's. It is conceivable that their greatest virtue was loyalty.

"You've done something your father never would have done," gulped Hook, "and I'll need more'n your word to believe it. We'll have a look at Skelly's shack."

"Because you know you won't find anything," said Caspar. "It was removed last night because my father knew Miss Rutherford had learned about it. You needn't try any of your innocence with me, Hook; you always knew about this secret trade. Do you think any sane person believes it could have gone on without your winking at it?

"You needn't look at me like that or call me names. I'm not going to carry on the game, something I always hated. It's now my duty to speak about it, for I can't leave anything undone that may help to clear up the mystery of my father's death. I say that doped bottle may have come from Skelly's shack—and probably did come from there—where many another came from."

"Oh, Mister Caspar," said the housekeeper, suddenly beginning to cry, "your father was a good master to me, and I heard the hard words you said to him to-day."

"What's that?" said Caspar, turning on her. "I said nothing and you heard nothing!"

"But I did," she said. "You know there was a terrible quarrel about Mrs. Dynevor and your wanting money."

"You old fool," said Caspar, "you go listening at doors and—and don't understand or hear half." He was very pale and had begun to sweat. He appealed to his audience. "It was nothing; I tell you it was nothing. You mustn't believe this woman; she's always been against me, because I warned my father of her thieving."

"Madam," said the sheriff sternly, full of the dignity of office, "you must relate what you heard. I caution you to speak the truth."

"As God is my judge," said the housekeeper, "I was in the dining room to-day, laying the table for lunch, and I heard them in here having wild words. First it was about Mister Caspar wanting money; he said the loan sharks was after him, and he must have two thousand by the first of the month. I didn't hear everything nor did I want to, and I couldn't help hearing what I did. Mr. Hammersley began to talk of Mister Caspar knowing Mrs. Dynevor before she was married——"

"What's that?" said Scott and Hook in a breath.

"Yes, sir. And then Mr. Hammersley says, 'By God, the more I see of your real character——' I didn't hear the rest. But then Mister Caspar shouts, 'It's a lie! And if you've been so hard up as you claim, then I guess what they said about you and Cousin Jim was right.' Yes, that's what you said," she finished, facing Caspar with metallic eyes. "You called your own father, that had always been so good to you, a murderer. And God will judge you for it."

"He as good as called me it first!" said Caspar, like a spoiled child defending an ill action. And, aware that he had admitted the truth of her statement, he burst into a torrent of explanations.

Scott waved them aside. "We'll come to the main point, Mr. Hammersley—the fact of your knowing Mrs. Dynevor before her marriage. Why have you kept it secret? You must realize that in your own interests it's advisable for you to explain fully all about this previous acquaintance and your reasons for not mentioning it."

Caspar looked from the group comprising Jill, Morney, and Potts to the implacable face of Hook, the sneering Stoll, the astonished Quiller, the appalled Dicksee, and the pompously official sheriff. "Send that woman away," he said finally, pointing to the housekeeper. "I'll tell you everything but not before her. Let the others remain."

He had recovered some measure of composure and, when the housekeeper had gone, continued with an effort, while he avoided looking at Morney. "What I'm going to say is the whole truth and, though I know it doesn't put me in a very favorable light, I'll volunteer it rather than have a possibly worse construction put on it. I met Mrs. Dynevor in London when she was Miss Tredegar, and she almost succeeded in making as big a fool of me as she did of Mr. Morney."

"You will leave me out of it, if you please," said Morney. "My affairs are my own."

"In this instance they are also mine," replied Caspar. "I think every one in this room knows the story of your elopement; well, I had some part in it and it's necessary to speak of it, if I'm to explain everything. I admit that for a time I thought myself in love with Miss Tredegar, even though I'd a pretty good idea of her real character—that all she cared about was marrying money and that she and that Kit-

teridge woman skated as near the thin edge of things as they dared. She kept me on a string until Mr. Morney came along with superior financial inducements.

"Of course the stage was set for him—I'm telling now what I learned afterward—and they left a rather lurid flat for that quiet one in Kensington. The psuedocousin merely opposed the marriage so as to hasten an elopement; they wanted the business rushed, and the marriage to take place away from London, before Mr. Morney happened to hear any tales or his father arrived on the scene. I don't know if they reckoned on the Scotch marriage law—that may have been a slip—but at the worst they could collect big alimony or breach of promise damages and then——"

"All this is very tiresome and by no means news to me," interrupted Morney. "I suppose you're leading up to the fact that it was you who informed the Edinburgh authorities?"

Caspar nodded. "Yes, Miss Tredegar had given me, and other acquaintances, the go-by, after meeting you, and I didn't even know her new address. Of course it would have queered her game to have anybody hanging round. But I happened by chance to be on the same train that took you to Scotland. I'd had my eyes opened, and no longer cared a rap for her, but when I got the hang of things I was spiteful enough to go to the police. I wasn't sore at you, but her; and I was sorry that she got off and left you to foot the bill."

"And was it spite against her, and not me, that led you to send the first garbled account to my father?" demanded Morney. "You needn't deny it; he told me so to-day."

Caspar fumbled his chin. "Yes, I admit that; have I tried to deny it? I can't say that I didn't feel a bit sore at you, too. You see I'm telling the whole truth and hiding nothing. And, whatever my motive, I, at least, saved you from such a marriage. You mustn't forget that."

"Why should you be sore at him, if you didn't care for the woman any longer?" asked Scott pointedly.

"I don't know," said Caspar. "We can't account for our likes and dislikes. I suppose it was a sort of dog-in-the-manger feeling. But I repeat that I didn't care for her any more, that what I had learned about her cured me of my brief infatuation. You must believe that. And I didn't see her in Edinburgh; I didn't want to see her. I didn't see her again, didn't know what had become of her, until she turned up here as Mr. Dynevor's wife. That's the truth. You can imagine our mutual astonishment and how upset she was. She begged me to say nothing of our former acquaintance because naturally she didn't want her husband to know of the Edinburgh affair.

"I don't know what tale she told him of her former life, or how much he believed or suspected, but I saw he was jealous and that there was no use making things worse. If I admitted knowing her in London, it would mean a lot of leading questions, and so I yielded to her pleading and consented to say nothing. In doing this, I wasn't influenced by anything but a sense of duty. I simply acted as I thought for the best and, I believe, as any one would have acted in similar circumstances. And so I didn't even tell my father."

He paused for a moment and then continued: "You've all heard something of my father's attempted bribery of Mr. Morney; well, I now admit the truth of it. It's hard for me to say this, but it's also necessary. Of course, I had nothing to do with it, but I learned of the attempt and knew that my father hated Mr. Morney because he wouldn't swear to a lie. I've admitted that I also disliked him, but for another reason; it had nothing to do with our inheriting the estate or his former relations with Mrs. Dynevor—I tell you again that I'd got over all that—but because his dog nearly killed mine and he threw me in the lake. You see I'm telling the truth about that matter and hiding nothing.

"Well, I now come to the time when it was proved that Mr. Dynevor was poisoned. I honestly believed that Mr. Morney was guilty and that, out of revenge, he was trying to put the blame on my father. You understand that, though my father knew about the Edinburgh affair, he had no reason to suspect that the Miss Tredegar in the case was Mrs. Dynevor. And I was afraid to say anything because it would mean that I must tell of my former acquaintance with her.

"I saw that what applied to Mr. Morney might also apply to me; people mightn't believe my reason for keeping silent about my former acquaintance with her; why, they might even say that I was still in love with her and that it was I who killed Mr. Dyne-

vor! I didn't know what to do, but at last I told my father. He agreed that it would be better not to mention the fact of my having known her, and he immediately saw a way out—to pretend that he had got the information through a detective agency.

"Now," concluded Caspar, wiping his damp forehead, "that's the whole truth about everything. As for the quarrel to-day with my father, you've heard a distorted version by a malignant woman who has good reason for being my enemy. It's true that I got into the grip of some New York loan sharks and that my father declined to help me. And it's true we both lost our tempers and said things we never meant. But that's all it was, an ordinary family quarrel."

There was a long silence, broken by Hook. "I guess you'd better come down to the house, Mr. Hammersley, and talk this over."

"Why? What for?" cried Caspar. "You don't believe me? Do you mean that I'm —I'm under arrest? You've no warrant! What's the charge? Why, you fool, do you think I—I killed my own father? Perhaps you believe I killed Mr. Dynevor, too! Scott knows——"

But that gentleman avoided him as he had avoided Morney. "A mere matter of form, Mr. Hammersley. You see, under the circumstances—I'm very sorry, but really, you know—— Of course when your story is substantiated——"

"By whom?" cried Caspar. "My father and Mrs. Dynevor are dead! I've told the whole truth, even against myself, and now you don't believe me!" He looked about him like a trapped animal, staring from one face to another. "Will no one believe me?"

The scene became distressing; he had become a pitiable abject creature, terror-stricken as if already he had been tried and condemned and was about to pass into the dread Room with the Little Door. Almost inarticulate he rushed over to Morney. "You believe me, don't you? You'll help me, won't you? I've done you a good turn, told the truth about that attempted bribery. I'm your friend, you know. And you're rich now; there's all your father's money back of you——"

"So far back that I can't reach it," said Morney. "You are under a misapprehension; I wasn't reinstated by my father. But buck up, can't you? You're only where I was yesterday, and I dare say they'll have somebody else to-morrow. They've yet to prove anything against you. Yes, I believe you, and I'll do everything in my power to help you."

TO BE CONCLUDED.

A RARE EMOTION

THE little fellow, sturdy and strong from his bare heels to the top of his wiry-haired head, had put up a good fight against the bully, a much larger boy, and had been thoroughly licked before his "big sister" arrived on the scene. She tenderly wiped the "mad tears" from his eyes and said she was sorry he had been hurt and how "wrong" it was for a big boy to whip a little one.

"I don't want you to be sorry for me!" said the defeated brave, wriggling from the abhorred embrace. "I ain't sorry for myself, am I? 'Sides, I can lick him, anyway!"

The kid had instinctively sensed a great psychological fact: that genuine sympathy is a rare emotion, and that, when people "feel sorry" for one another, their real meaning is hard to stomach. Sympathy is the sharing of another's feeling, whether that feeling be of sorrow or of joy. But note the facial expression, the ring of the voice, even the give-away attitude, when the average adult "sympathizes" with another adult who is in trouble.

It is as if the "sympathizer" said: "Of course, it's all very pitiful that you should be in this fix, but a fellow like myself, an efficient, sensible, up-to-date person never allows himself to be hit this way. Wouldn't you like to be in my place? I tell you, old top, it's fine for me to be sitting up here so well fixed that I can slip you this ten-spot, or give you this advice, or tell you what a bone-headed mutt you are!"

No wonder the real he-man always runs from sympathy. To submit to it is like begging alms.

The Prodigal Nephew

By L. H. Robbins

Author of "The Detour," "Wildfire," Etc.

It was powerful medicine that Professor Plato Dill prescribed, but, on the whole, it was not "bad medicine"

"OWN up, Oliver," said Professor Plato Dill to me, at the end of a perfect Astorbilt dinner, "own up that when you go forth alone to seek dramatic entertainment in this frivolous metropolis, you always pick out something pure and refined."

"Always, when alone," I confessed sadly.

"Same here," said he. "I am too much a Pharisee to be caught unsupported at anything more stimulating than polite or nicely poetic drama. I am a moral coward."

We exchanged sinister looks. The professor and I were on our way home from a week at Lake Kezar, where one of those April blizzards that make the State of Maine so favorably known among salmon fishermen had greatly lowered our vitality. After the hardships of the week we had stopped off in New York for a night of much-needed rest and recuperation.

"Oliver, far be it from me to spread a snare for your innocent feet. But here is a long evening before us; here's you to lend respectability to me, and here's me to chaperon you."

"Two tired churchmen together," I observed, "may go anywhere without scandal. From the glitter in your eye I see that you think of luring me to a beauty show. Well, sir, I will not desert you in your dark hour. My wholesome presence at your side shall be a shield to you against Apollyon's arrows. Hadn't we better see about tickets before the rush begins?"

Thus it happened that we occupied orchestra seats at "Flivvodora," which the scalper assured us was the most restful thing in town; and thus we came to witness the madness of Horace Wallace.

The third act was going full tilt—I had nearly written "full kilt." The million-dollar beauty chorus had shaken its curls and its toes at us. Lettie Lorrocks had warbled, in whose lovely vicinity the other dimpled damsels seemed as Green Mountain potatoes beside a Delaware peach. Our applause brought her out from the wings to dazzle us again with her merry smile.

At that happy moment we saw a young man in evening dress jump from a box to the stage, rush at Miss Lorrocks, clasp her in his arms, and kiss her on her left eye. People stared in wonder, then hoarsely hurrahed. The little distraction was part of the show, no doubt; the theater borrowed tricks from the circus, as everybody knew.

But things went right on happening on the stage—things that seemed too businesslike to be "business." Miss Lorrocks fought free from the young man's embrace, ripping a lace ruffle off her sleeve in the struggle. Next she flung one of her plump little fists to the young man's jaw, rammed the other neatly to his nose, and followed with a whirl of clawings that left red streaks on his cheeks and tore the white lawn tie off his neck. All the while her merry smile was missing.

Slowly the young man backed away, never lifting his arms to defend his features, taking the love taps of the lady as a gentleman should, until stage manager and stage hands galloped out from behind, gathered him up by various parts of his person, and dragged him ignominiously off, to the enthusiastic delight of the audience and the visible amusement of the million-dollar chorus. Miss Lorrocks, having won in one round, made her exit without bow or smile, and the play went on.

The professor and I looked at each other horrified.

"That was Horace Wallace," said he.

"Never mind," I answered. "Perhaps he was too busy to notice us. Let's hope for the best."

"The boy must be drunk. His aunt will be all broken up over this."

People near by began to hiss at us in the

familiar manner of certain low forms of animal life. They wanted to hear what impromptu comment the leading comedian was about to make upon the inadvertent interlude. So we put off discussing the misbehavior of the wayward nephew of Mrs. Matilda Wallace, our corpulent and opulent neighbor in University Park, until we left the theater. Then Plato Dill alluded.

"Shall we inquire what became of the young reprobate? Maybe he's in jail."

"Be glad if he is. His aunt would tell you the same thing. This is a large town he has undertaken to paint, and he is not very strong. Let him have a good night's rest."

We gave no further thought to the spoiled youth whose doings had for some years scandalized our polite suburb. But at the University Park railway station at noon next day, when we got down from the New York train, we were reminded of him by seeing the Wallace automobile beside the platform.

In the driver's seat was Harriet Wallace, sister of Horace, looking neat and trim in the uniform of a motor-corps girl. I am fond of Harriet. She is eighteen and a good fellow—a better fellow, I am afraid, as well as a better golfer, a better tennis player, and a better all-around human being than her brother, who has had four more years than she in which to amount to something. Beside her on the seat was Binks, her fox terrier.

"What are you doing in khaki?" Dill asked her. "Isn't the war over?"

"Not at our house," she answered. "Has no one written you about our robbery? Hop in, and I'll enlighten you while I drive you home."

As we rolled along the park drives, Harriet put us up to date on home news. Her aunt's house had been entered by burglars. The safe had been opened and a package of new fifty-dollar bills, forty in all, had been taken, along with a case of Mrs. Wallace's jewels.

Detectives had come out from the adjoining city of Penfield and put the household through an inquisition. They declared it an inside job. A driving glove, recognized as one belonging to Otto, the chauffeur, had been found underneath the looted safe.

"So they arrested Otto," said Harriet, "and took him away to the Penfield prison. Auntie, the soft-hearted thing, went into town next day and gave them a Liberty Bond, or whatever you give the police when you want to set anybody free. But Otto will have to be tried, so we can't have him around, and that is why I am wearing khaki. Horace offered to take Otto's place, but aunty wouldn't let him. You know the tree-climbing kind of driver Horace is."

"I saw your brother in New York last night," I remarked.

"Was he behaving himself? I'm sure he was, for aunty has been severe with him lately about money. She has cut his allowance to one hundred dollars a week, and she says if he wants more he will have to earn it himself. When he went away he threatened to get a job at demonstrating airplanes. Did he seem to be working when you saw him? Because a hundred a week will hardly keep him in neckties."

Certainly he had been losing neckties at a great rate on the "Flivvodora" stage. I wondered if his escapade would find its way into print. The story would make rich reading for the rich friends of the rich Wallace family. I felt sorry we had left Horace to his fate. We should have done something for the sake of the kind-hearted woman who had been a foster mother to him and his sister since their babyhood.

To my relief, there was no gossip at the park clubhouse that night. Horace was there in person, explaining the scratches on his face. Some careless New Yorker, he said, had left a bunch of nails sticking out.

II.

One evening soon after our return from Maine, Professor Dill said to me: "Oliver, how would you like to become a poison squad for twenty-four hours?"

I had discovered him at work in the laboratory behind his house, where he has produced more wonderful salts, essences, tinctures, and gunpowders, I suppose, than are credited to any other chemist in the world. This evening he had on an oilcloth apron, and he held up to the light a beaker partly filled with a liquor bright green in color.

"No arsenic for mine, thanks," I told him.

"This is not arsenious," said he. "It is purely vegetable and harmless."

"Crème de menthe?" I suggested hopefully.

He drew back the glass out of my reach.

"I distilled some of this pretty stuff today for the second time in my life. The first

time—but I'll tell you about that later. The question is called for: Will you sip a little of my new medicine and let me take your readings for a day?"

"What will it do to me?"

"That is for you to report to-morrow. It may have no effect."

"A short life and a gay one," said I.

Dill drew a little water in a tumbler and stirred in a half teaspoonful of the green brew. I drank the mixture down. It had no taste or odor.

"How soon do the gnawing pains begin?" I demanded.

"Ask me in the morning," he replied, and put the beaker away on a shelf, with a circle of filter paper over it.

"I saw Mrs. Wallace showing you her tulip beds to-day," I remarked.

"We were looking at the window the robber broke. A peculiar affair, Oliver, that burglary. The thief went in through a cellar window and jimmied open the door at the top of the cellar stairs. In both operations he smashed things badly. But he opened the safe without leaving a mark."

"The work on the window and the door," said I, "shows that he was an amateur. The work on the safe shows that he knew the combination. Therefore, he was some one in the Wallace household. Chauffeur Otto's glove was found under the safe, which nails the blame on Otto. Simple as A B C."

"The glove might have been left there by some one besides Otto."

"That's true—and Mrs. Wallace seems to think Otto is innocent. Why, otherwise, did she go his bail?"

"She has a new worry now," said Dill. "She is afraid the police think that her darling nephew Horace was the robber."

"Then the arrest of Otto was a blind to beguile the real culprit?"

"So she believes. The poor woman is distracted. She had a row with Horace lately and sent him out into the cold world to look for a job. While he hunted for the job she allowed him a beggarly hundred a week, as Harriet told us."

"And now Mrs. Wallace thinks that her harshness drove him into committing the crime?"

"Yes. She suspects that the police are watching for him to try to sell her jewels, which he will do as soon as he has spent the two thousand in cash that he stole along with the gems."

"If she is sure that Horace is the thief, why doesn't she offer him her forgiveness, get back the jewels and tell the police it's all off?"

"She has tried that, and Horace won't be forgiven. The rascal gets insulted whenever she mentions it. Meanwhile, we may presume, his two thousand is shrinking, the time for pawning the jewels draws nearer, and the police quietly wait."

"Another thing," said the professor. "Mrs. Wallace is worried about Otto. He is the broody kind, she says. His good name is gone. She is afraid the man may do himself harm if the affair isn't cleared up soon."

I pictured Horace going over the top at the beauty show to kiss the pretty soubrette, and I thought of poor Otto under a cloud. I should have enjoyed using a putter on Horace.

Going home from my visit with Plato Dill, I still reflected upon the young man's wickedness. But after I had gone to bed I began to think about my own.

Although I did relish that beauty show, I am not the chief of sinners; my record is not so black as the ace of spades, quite. I don't pretend to be a saint, but my respect for respectability has kept me so well within the narrow path that I can serve as a vestryman in our park chapel without fearing that my past will walk in at the door some Sabbath day and bawl me out before the congregation.

As I tried to go to sleep that night, however, the conviction came over me that I was a bad one through and through. I flopped and tossed; I tried to shake the feeling off by sitting up. But it grew with the hours. It seemed to me that the angel of remorse sat on the edge of my bed and recounted my sins.

"You flatter yourself that you are a pretty good sort," said the specter. "Do you remember the mother rabbit you shot when you were young?"

"I do."

"Do you remember the unutterable sadness in her dying eyes?"

"Shall I ever forget it?"

"Do you remember the cat you wounded, and how your victim crawled out from under the barn, weeks afterward, dragging its hind quarters helpless on the ground?"

"Good night to you," said I, and turned over; but the specter went around to the other side of the bed and went on guying.

"There was a pie—a blueberry pie. Remember how you slipped into the pantry when the cook's back was turned, and how you hooked that pie?"

"I was only a boy then."

"A nice, truthful boy. You gave your mother your word as a little Christian gentleman that you knew nothing about the pie. They convicted the cook's son. He was less intelligent than you, for when they accused him he wept, which proved his guilt. They left welts on his legs. Did you make it up to that boy for bearing your beating? Not you, Oliver. You went to Sunday school; you sang 'Yield Not To Temptation, For Yielding Is Sin.' They gave you a prayer book that day for never yielding and——"

I pulled a pillow over my head.

"No sleep yet a while, Oliver. Let us examine a few cases not so far back in your honorable career. There was the matter of the deciding set you played for the tennis cup which adorns your mantel. The score in games was seven for you, six for the other chap. The umpire failed to see the shot. They let you say where the other fellow's lob had lit."

My ears burned with shame.

"You said, in your pleasant way, that it was your impression the shot struck the clay about three inches behind the back line. Liar! It was on the line, and you knew it."

So ran my thoughts that night. All the mean and sneaking deeds I had ever done, all the unworthy desires I had ever harbored in my heart came back to stand around my bed and put their tongues out at me, haunting and taunting me till the cold sweat broke out. This is a decent magazine. I shall not recite them all.

My mother heard me stirring.

"Oliver, what's the matter?"

"Mother," I answered, across the dark hall, "do you remember the blueberry pie little Willie Bolling stole in 1887?"

"Yes, I do. What about it?"

"Willie didn't steal that pie, mother. I stole it, and I ate it, and Willie got the licking."

"Isn't it rather late in life, as well as late at night, to be bragging of such a thing? Get up," said my mother, "and open another window. You need air."

At breakfast she asked me: "Do you know that you had a nightmare last night?"

"Did I?"

"You were talking the worst nonsense. I can't think what we had for supper that could have upset you so."

Strangely, my spell of contrition had passed with the darkness. I felt no longer impelled to advertise myself as the persecutor of rabbits and tomcats and Willie Bolling. It had been a nightmare, surely.

"Well," said Professor Dill, when I reported to him according to my promise. "You are still alive?"

"I feel fine," I replied.

"You lay awake, perhaps?"

"Till four o'clock.

"Thinking pleasant thoughts of yourself?"

"You poisoned me," I declared. "It was the green nightcap you gave me that kept me awake."

"Tell me the kind of thoughts you had."

I told him of the soul-harrowing tortures I had suffered, and how the sins of my life had put on a pageant of scarlet shame and dark-blue dishonor at my bedside.

"The green medicine I gave you," said Plato Dill, "is the worst depressant in the pharmacopœia. It is not offered for sale in the drug stores, the suicide rate being high enough already. I took some of it once, in my young and careless days, and my present moral spotlessness is the result."

He talked of the derivation of his "purely vegetable and harmless" compound. The formula I am happy to have forgotten. He spoke also of the peculiar effect of the stuff upon the nervous system. I knew all about that. I knew that just as a bromide soothes a person in pain, and just as alcohol causes a man to believe that his mind is working like sixty, so the green potion distilled by Professor Dill wakens memory to pernicious activity. It has, as they say, a kick in it.

The beaker was still upon its shelf under the disk of filter paper.

"You have made enough of the conscience quickener," I observed, "to start a Statewide religious revival. A quart of it, judiciously distributed, would cause a certain popular evengelist to look about as effective in action as a dull little boy with adenoids. A barrelful would bring the millennium."

"I have promised Mrs. Wallace to try a dose of it on her prodigal nephew," said Plato Dill. "Come along and tell her what you went through last night."

"I won't tell her all that I went through," I replied. "But I will promise her that the stuff won't create a habit."

We went up the hill to the stately home of Mrs. Wallace. We saw nephew Horace resting in a hammock on the veranda, smoking a cigarette and dreaming, perhaps, of Lettie Lorrocks. At the side of the garage his sister, in rubber boots and farmerette overalls, was washing a car, assisted by Binks, the fox terrier. She waved the sponge at us and sang out that aunt Matilda was in the garden.

The mistress of the place was red and breathless from bending her two hundred pounds over the flower beds. Her hands were gloved; in one she held a trowel.

"I read—in a fashion magazine," she panted, "that farming—reduces the flesh. It reduces—the breath, all right. Fetch me that garden chair before I expire."

When she was seated, Plato Dill began.

"As I promised you, Mrs. Wallace, I have tried the moral medicine on a—on a patient. Oliver tested it last night. He is still with us, you see."

"What did it do to you, Oliver?"

"It made me a better man, Mrs. Wallace. After one trial dose of Old Doctor Dill's Elixir of Repentance I shall never need another."

"Have you got the tonic on you?" she asked Dill.

He gave her the bottle into which he had poured the contents of the beaker. She conned it critically and declared it would make a pretty shade for a silk dress to be worn by a lady while farming. I ventured to predict that it would make a farmer out of Horace.

"The loafer!" she exclaimed. "Yet, you know, I could forgive him his idleness, his wastefulness and all, if he were only a gentleman. I used to think he was one. I couldn't see anything really bad in him, I loved him so much. But this last cute little prank of his is the limit. It's the last, final, ultimate limit—letting a poor workingman suffer for his sin, and refusing to confess to me so that I can save him from having the world find out what a yellow dog he is."

I have seen aunts who looked more indulgent than Mrs. Wallace at that moment.

"How much of this is a dose?" she asked.

"A level teaspoonful," said Dill.

And mine had been only half! I trembled for Horace.

"Do you guarantee it not to kill? I want the boy bumped, professor, but I don't want him bumped off. I love him still. I'm a regular old fool——"

We were appropriately solemn in the presence of womanly tears.

"If it takes hold of him too hard," said Dill, "I shall have an antidote ready."

III.

About noon next day my mother came to my study to say that Harriet Wallace was asking for me on the wire.

"Oliver, we are in awful trouble up here," said Harriet, in frightened tones. "The whole family has gone crazy, all but me. Auntie is having hysteric after hysteric; Horace is locked in his room and raging like a house afire, and I feel miserable, myself. I want to send for Doctor Paddock, but auntie says to call you and Professor Dill."

She met us at the door a few minutes thereafter with a very pale face and the information that auntie was in the back parlor, drowning in tears. Handkerchiefs rained out of Mrs. Wallace's lap as that afflicted lady rose to greet us.

"O Lord! Plato Dill, what have we done? Hurry upstairs to Horace. Don't mind me. I'm a wicked old woman; I deserve all that's coming to me. But he is young and tender and inexperienced. He hasn't any brains and he may try to blow them out any minute. Did you bring the anecdote—I mean the antidote? Give him some of it quick, and save a little for me. Professor, professor, I'm so wicked and wretched!"

She wrung her handkerchiefs.

"What's the matter?" Dill asked. "Did you dose yourself while you were dosing your nephew?"

"Do you think," she stormed, "that I would give Horace anything I wouldn't take myself?"

Harriet showed us the way, though we needed no guide, for through a closed door at the head of the stairs came such cries of rage and anguish as might be expected from a German high admiral trapped and sunk in one of his U-boats. We listened outside and heard an astonishing burst of language in the smoke-husky voice of Horace.

He said: "Oh, what a fool I am! Oh, what a chump! Oh, what a flivver! Lord, Lord, what's the matter with me?"

I don't say it was funny. It was a prayer.

"He has had an overdose," said Dill, and tapped on the door.

"Horace, open up! Let me in!"

"Go on away;" the young man barked.

Harriet spoke of a balcony. We found it. Luckily, Horace had not locked his windows. He offered no resistance when we entered. His coat and collar were off. His hands clutched his head. "I think I'm going dotty," said he.

"Listen to me, my boy," spoke Plato Dill. "You have never been saner in your life. From what I have overheard outside your door, I should say you were in your right mind for once."

"I'm a wild ass, Professor Dill. I'm a leper."

"Would it relieve your feelings to tell some one in just what way lately you have been wild and leprous?"

"Do you mean confess? Will a man on fire jump in a lake? Call my aunt."

I unlocked the door. The portly Mrs. Wallace stood outside, quivering with sobs.

"My poor, dear boy!" she cried, sailing toward him with arms outspread. He backed away and held up his hand tragically.

"Wait till I have spilled my story. Wait till you know what a piker your poor dear boy is."

She stamped her foot. "Horace, don't you say a word. Don't you do any confessing to these gentlemen, or to me, or to anybody on earth."

She turned to the professor and shook a sopping handkerchief in his face.

"Drat you and your green medicine! You might have killed him. And all the while I was the one to confess. I'm the sinner. Horace never would have robbed the safe if I hadn't driven him to it. I might have known he couldn't live on a hundred a week. I hoped he would go broke and then come to me and promise to be a better nephew. But he was bull-headed, like all the rest of the Wallaces. He wouldn't grovel; he had the Wallace pride, and I loved him for it as hard as I pitied him. I wanted to give him more money, but how could I when he wouldn't ask for it?"

"Aunt Matilda," the young man broke in, "you shut up and let me tell this."

"Am I to be 'shut up' in my own house?" she retorted. "I have the floor, I think. It was this way, professor. My nephew had taken to staying away from home nights. I suppose he was sulking because I'd been sharp with him. I wanted to bring him back without letting him know I wanted him back. I was too darned mean to tell him. So I arranged the robbery. I was the robber—or Otto was, at my order. I ordered Otto to break into the house, and Otto did. I wanted Horace to see how helpless we womenfolk were without him on the premises. I know I'm an old she-devil——"

"Aunt, you're nothing of the sort," cried Horace. "You're an angel. You have no call to blame yourself for what I did."

"Will you keep still, Horace Wallace? Are you the boss in this house, or am I? So Otto broke in. He broke the window and the door, according to instructions. But when the detectives came—I sent for 'em, for I was bound to do the thing in proper style for its effect upon Horace—they asked me if the safe had been touched. I opened it, and there if all my jewelry wasn't gone, and two thousand dollars in fifty-dollar bills, besides!

"Before I could think how to head them off, they found Otto's glove and arrested Otto; and I saw Otto on the side and paid him a bonus of a month's wages to keep his mouth shut till I could have a chance to talk to Horace."

"You suspected your nephew at once, then?" Dill asked.

"Who else but Horace knew where I kept the numbers of the combination written down on the wall—a thing I have to do, for I am weak-minded about numbers and always forgetting them, though I may be strong-minded about other things. It was Horace, of course."

"And when you talked to him, he took offense and refused to plead guilty, eh?"

Mrs. Wallace sobbed again. "After the way I had treated him, letting him have money to burn and then cutting him down to a miserable hundred a week, he did perfectly right. Any boy of spirit would have done as he did.

"But when he went mulish and wouldn't own up, it made me almost frantic, for the money he stole was not real money, at all. It was counterfeit stuff that my husband left when he died. Somebody sold him a satchelful of it once, and it looked so good I never could bear to throw it away. Imagine how I felt, knowing that my nephew was circulating bogus fifty-dollar bills around New York and heading for a chilled-steel cell in a cold, stone jail. I——"

"Aunt Matilda," shouted Horace, "I'm going to talk. Professor, I stole the money that night, just as she says. I didn't know about the broken window and door. I came out on the late train, let myself in with my latchkey, opened the safe, and took out the money and the diamonds. And I've got the stuff hidden in the attic this minute, in an old Franklin heater up there, every bit of it. I haven't spent a nickel of the money. I didn't steal it to spend it."

"Why did you steal it, then?" asked Dill.

"I wanted to give her a scare so that she would be sorry she had driven me away from home. I wanted her to see what it would be like without a man in the house nights. When they nabbed Otto I promised him my weekly allowance for as long as he would keep mum and play the game. I kept stringing Aunt Matilda along because I wanted her to be good and sorry before I forgave her. That's how grateful I was for all she's done for me. I'm not fit to be her nephew. I'm not fit to be her—her garbage man!"

Mrs. Wallace made no effort to mop up the tide of tears that washed down her red cheeks.

"You're a better nephew than a wicked old woman deserves, Horace, dear. That's what I am—a wicked old woman. The spiteful things I've done in my life! The camouflage I've put out! The strutting and posing I do, knowing very well what an ignorant old snare and delusion I am! I remember, one time——"

A heart-broken gurgle sounded outside the door. Harriet came into sight, resting her shoulder against the door post and holding her face in her hands.

"Aunty, dear," she moaned, "I can't keep it back any longer. Do you remember the five-pound box of chocolates on the store bill last month, that you said you hadn't ordered and wouldn't pay the grocer for? I bought those chocolates, auntie, dear, one day when I was in Penfield. I charged them and never told you. I could just die, I'm so unhappy."

"What's a box of chocolates?" cried her brother. "The other night in New York I met 'Bush' Lyman, and he knew where we could get cocktails, and afterward we went to a show, and the soubrette jollied me till I climbed over the footlights and hugged her and got kicked into the alley for breaking up the show. But that's nothing. Let me tell you about the mess I was in at Rankhill's."

"That mess is what I quarreled with you about in the first place," said Mrs. Wallace. "You see all the trouble that has come of my meddling. As if a young man had no right to see the world and not grow up a molly-coddle! Oh! why am I so vain and hard and bossy?"

Professor Dill looked at me and closed one eye. We stood up to take our departure.

"Mrs. Wallace," said he, "how did you administer the green medicine?"

"I put it in the coffee percolator," she replied. "I don't allow Harriet to drink coffee yet, so there was only Horace and me to be poisoned, and——"

"Auntie, dear," broke in Harriet quickly, "I was just going to tell you. I sneaked a cup of coffee after you were through breakfast."

It was a touching family picture they made on the sofa, with Aunt Matilda in the middle and her niece and nephew weeping on her ample shoulders. In the midst of their blissful reconciliation, Binks, the fox terrier, romped into the room and laid a much-chewed driving glove at their feet.

"Another confession," cried Professor Dill. "It was Binks that framed up Otto by leaving the mate to that glove under the safe. Does Binks drink coffee, too?"

"Plato Dill," spoke Mrs. Wallace, through her tears, "I read once about a kind of malt extract the ancient Greeks used to drink to forget their pains and sorrows."

"Nepenthe, you mean?"

"I don't know the Latin name for it but I know this, Plato Dill, that the smartest thing you can do for yourself is to go home and brew some of that—that——"

"Nepenthe."

"Some of that whatever-it-is, because you are going to have a raft of pain and sorrow to forget before I am through paying you back for what you have done to me and mine. You old poisoner!"

But the supper tables in his home and mine that day were beautified with bouquets of daffodils from the Wallace garden.

The Starfish Tattoo

By Arthur Tuckerman

Author of "The Ship of Hate," "The Hand of Ming," Etc.

A tattoo mark was the added touch that proved Royden an artist in impersonation. Yet its effect was surprisingly different from the one he had planned

THEY were seated at a rickety little table in a Pernambuco drink shop, Royden and his friend Cawlish. It was an untidy, evil-smelling place, tucked away in a dark alley not far from the water front—the kind of place that seems instinctively to cringe from the candid glare of a noonday sun.

Royden surveyed the swaying figure opposite him with a sense of growing disgust.

"Downhill, Cawlish," he said. "Every day a little lower. Pretty soon they'll call us just plain beach combers—the both of us."

Cawlish stared at him, a look of vague distress in his watery blue eyes. He made a palpable, rather pitiful effort to pull himself together, and he seemed suddenly apologetic.

"You don't have to go down with me, Royden. You got a chance left; you can leave the stuff alone, and I can't. Listen. Last night I got to thinkin' about you. Why don't you go back—to the States—and start again? You can do it, because you're young and you got the advantage of bein' well born. See what I mean, Royden?"

He paused a moment, to gulp down the vicious contents of the glass before him.

"What I mean is," he went on with a kind of drunken persistency, "you've got the right makins'. Why, dammit, look at the very way you *sip* your liquor, instead of swilling it down—like the rest of us swine. Beat it, Royden, before this place gets you!"

Royden laughed harshly.

"Shut up, Cawlish. You weren't born to be a preacher."

Cawlish was always absurd like this—when he was drunk. But the thing was true, just the same. There came into Royden's mind, then, a dim but vaguely beautiful picture—a big, comfortable, white house surrounded by green lawns, an old-fashioned garden of hollyhocks and Canterbury bells, a peaceful New England road, arched with leafy elms—he had been a decent fellow then, the pride of a proud old family. They had sent him to college. All that, of course, had been years ago.

A sudden spasm of pain crossed his brow as his thoughts turned to that tragic night at college, when he had risen unsteadily from the card table and crept to his room—every cent he had, and a great deal more, pledged to his friends. A night of agony, and the next morning—a forged check; it had been so simple.

Later on, discovery—and flight.

Of the intervening years his impressions were varied, and lacking any coherent sequence, a series of vivid cinematic impressions; many ships, many ports, many lands; brutal dockyard work in a British seaport; a longing for something better, and then a year in a foreign regiment at a torrid Sahara post, where there was a relentless, pitiless, white sun. Desertion, sudden and swift, when he could stand it no longer. Then the Brazilian rubber plantation, which turned out a failure, like the rest. And now he was down to the very dregs.

Cawlish began droning again.

"There's a yacht down at the harbor, a big, white yacht—bound for New York. Fellow on board her told me a steward died last night, of fever. You could do that, Royden. An' then—in New York you could find somethin' to do worth while. See what I mean?"

Royden shot him a vicious glance.

"You're an idealist, Cawlish—and a hell of a poor one at that."

Nevertheless, as he left the drink shop Royden paused to glance at himself appraisingly in a cracked mirror near the door. He saw himself, a tall, loose-limbed figure, with sharp and bitter features. He looked, almost, as if he hated the very world he lived

in. His clothes were worn and faded, a heavy, reddish beard sprouted from his gaunt chin. He laughed again, so suddenly and bitterly that Cawlish staggered away from him, cringing with fear.

That very evening Royden brushed his clothes carefully and strolled down to the harbor. He had secured the stewards' berth aboard the yacht *Thessaly* by six o'clock.

The *Thessaly* was a palatial craft. From the crew Royden learned that her owner, John Blackstone, was an American—the man whose brains and money had made the great Amazon railroad across Brazil a human possibility; he had made the building of it his life's greatest work. And now, after ten long years, Blackstone was returning home to enjoy the fruits of a gigantic success.

As the yacht swung her nose to sea, Royden, clad in a new, white uniform, served dinner to Blackstone in the pink and gold luxury of a Louis XIV. saloon amidships. Dish after dish, cooked to perfection by a French chef, came from the galley, while Blackstone ate in silence—seemingly oblivious of Royden's presence. By the time the meal was over Royden felt an inexplicable sense of hatred toward this man who had everything.

The delicate luxuries of the yacht had, as a matter of fact, brought back to Royden certain vivid memories of the past, of the things that had once been his for the asking, and which he had placidly accepted as his natural right. The softly upholstered armchairs; the silver that gleamed brightly under the rose-tinted lamps; the fine, white damask; the cut-glass decanters containing rich, rare wines—all these things affected him queerly. He found himself wishing, bitterly, that he had stayed down there with Cawlish—in the dregs, where he now belonged.

Off the coast of Martinique a week later the *Thessaly* plunged into a thick, deadening fog. Royden, in his bunk, heard the mournful shriek of the fog horn, and cursed it because it had awakened him. This was about midnight. Presently he dropped off again into a fitful sleep.

Hours later he regained his senses—very slowly, as if he were emerging from some deep trance. He found himself lying on the cabin floor, his head throbbing painfully where it had struck the door, when he had been flung from his bunk. He sat up suddenly and opened his eyes—to find the cabin in pitch darkness. He shouted, then, at the top of his voice in a sudden, unreasoning fear. But no answer came.

In a frenzy of fear he flung on his clothes and staggered out of the cabin. The whole ship was in darkness. No sound broke the stillness, except the padding of his own stockinged feet. Eventually he managed to grope his way to the deck.

The night was thick with a swirling, enveloping dampness that hid all but a few feet of deck from view; it made him feel suddenly clammy from head to foot; the silence was complete but for the sullen lapping of the becalmed sea against the yacht's hull. He made his way forward along a deck that was slanted at an ugly angle, and discovered a gaping wound in the starboard bow, where the jagged edge of a reef—ambushed in the gray blanket of fog—had dealt the yacht a cowardly blow. Royden knew that she was sinking—but very slowly, almost imperceptibly.

And then he saw that all the lifeboats were gone, that every davit was empty. Apparently the captain, the crew, and Blackstone had fled in a wild panic—without a thought of him. The cowards! He cursed them one and all, loudly.

He turned aft, unsteadily, owing to the absurd angle of the deck, trying vainly all the while to pierce the thick darkness with his eyes. He searched with his hands for the touch of a lifeboat, a raft, anything upon which he might make his escape. As he breasted the chart house his feet tripped suddenly upon a heavy object lying across the deck, and he sprawled to his knees.

He fumbled in his pocket and found a match; lighting it, he held the yellow flare above the thing he had tripped upon. It was the body of John Blackstone; his high, white forehead fearfully marred, where some falling deck tackle had struck him a mortal blow. Something in the dead man's face made Royden look again. An uncanny feeling crept over him. It was as if he were looking at himself. In death the wrinkles had left Blackstone's features, making him look some ten years younger. Blackstone was tall, and loosely built, just as Royden was; Blackstone's hair was of a sandy reddish color—so was Royden's; they were about the same weight.

In two points only did they differ; Blackstone was clean shaven, while Royden wore

a heavy russet beard. The other thing Royden did not notice until later, when he had read the letter in Blackstone's pocketbook. They were, of course, dressed as differently as two men could be. Blackstone wore a heavy suit of rich gray tweed while Royden was clad in a white duck uniform.

Presently Royden went into the chart house and found a lamp; he brought it out on deck and placed it beside Blackstone's body. Then, coolly and deliberately, he proceeded to search the dead man's clothes.

He found a thin diamond-studded watch, a gold fountain pen, and a pocketbook. In the pocketbook were some eight hundred dollars in Brazilian currency, several visiting cards, and a letter bearing a New York postmark, addressed to Blackstone at Pernambuco. Royden opened the letter and read it by the feeble orange glow of the lamp. The heading bore the name of a well-known New York club. The letter ran:

> DEAR JOHN: All your old friends, and I particularly, were very glad to get the news that you were coming home after all these years. I think you'll drop back quickly into the old ways. Cedar Point is in order, in fact I went over it thoroughly the other day, and I've managed to get a few good servants. We long for your safe arrival; some of us old stick-at-homes persist in thinking that a long sea voyage is always attended with nameless perils, in spite of wireless and such things——

Royden smiled grimly. He continued to peruse the letter hurriedly, until he reached the final paragraph. This he reread several times; a cunning gleam of light came into his eyes—at the birth of a sudden, fantastic idea:

> After ten years we'll hardly know you. You must have changed like the rest of us, but the old crowd is still here, John, ready to welcome you—Lefferts, Van Bruns, and the rest, gray-haired and fat in their middle age. And even if you've changed a whole lot, I told the fellows—jokingly—that we'd always be able to recognize you by that queer little starfish tattooed on your wrist! Remember that night, years ago—after one of your big parties—when we all went down to the harbor, and several of us insisted on making an old sailor tattoo us? A foolish prank, but it amused us at the time. Always your old friend,
>
> HARRIS FLETCHER.

Royden replaced the letter in the pocketbook and peered sharply at the dead man's hands. Upon the left wrist he discovered a five-pointed starfish, tattooed in bright blue ink.

He smiled slowly as he thought of Blackstone's house, illuminated and warm and hospitable, filled with well-trained servants, waiting in vain for a dead man. To live for a month—even for a week—amid those comforts which had been his birthright! To escape, just for a little while, from the everlasting hardship, the grime and filth, the brutality of the life that he had led for all these years! If only he could do that!

He took the lamp below and made a hurried inspection of the hold; the water was filtering in very slowly. There would be time. Eyes filled with deep purpose, he hurried aft to Blackstone's cabin; there he found what he wanted—a pair of scissors, a safety razor, a cake of soap.

At dawn on the following morning the Panama-Atlantic liner *Culebra,* bound for New York, sighted a piece of floating wreckage off the southern coast of Martinique. A lifeboat was launched immediately, while the liner hove to. When the rescue crew returned, fifteen minutes later, they brought with them a clean-shaven, affluent-looking man dressed in gray tweed. To avoid notoriety this gentleman fled to a cabin, requesting the purser that his identity be kept secret, if possible. It soon became rumored, however, that the shipwrecked man was John Blackstone.

It was some time before Royden could accustom himself to the deference with which he was treated aboard the *Culebra;* he began to realize, slowly, the power of Blackstone's name. He remained as much as he could in the solitude of his cabin, and found stewards at his beck and call to obey his slightest command. It was all very new and pleasant, and as the ship approached New York his plans took definite shape within his mind.

He was too level-headed to presume for an instant that he could carry the thing on indefinitely without discovery. He came to the conclusion, that the sensible thing for him to do would be to live Blackstone's life for a period of a few weeks only, in which time he could draw from the dead man's bank some fifty thousand dollars. Fifty thousand dollars! It was hard to realize those figures! And then—before it became necessary for John Blackstone to look up any of his old friends, and plunge once more into the intimacies of social life—he would disappear—into oblivion. He would go to South Africa, or Australia perhaps, where

there would be little likelihood of being traced. His working days would be over, too!

As the *Culebra* left quarantine and slowly passed by the Statue of Liberty, Royden noticed a bronzed sailor polishing the brass of the taffrail at his side; the man had a python and a dancing girl brazenly tattooed upon his muscular forearm.

"Who did that work of art for you?" Royden asked, nodding at the tattoo with casual good humor.

The sailor straightened up and grinned.

"Old fellow by the name of Skinner. Watchman at the Cuban fruit docks, near the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He often makes a little spare cash doing that kind of thing." He gazed for a moment, proudly, at the dancing girl and then resumed his polishing.

Royden landed at noon; he hailed a taxicab as soon as he had left the pier.

"Go to the Cuban fruit docks," he told the driver.

The tattooing proved less painful than he had anticipated.

When Royden reached Cedar Point, that night, he was overawed. The great marble house, the terraced rose gardens, the sloping lawns, the lofty rooms, stunned him with their sheer magnificence. The servants, all of them new to the place, gave him little cause for worry it was obvious that they suspected nothing. Evening clothes lay ready for him upon an armchair in the great white-and-gold bedroom overlooking the garden which he understood had always been his; and an obsequious valet prepared for him a steaming bath.

"Mr. Fletcher thought you would want your old room," said the valet, "so we prepared it for you. Is everything quite right, sir?"

Royden nodded quickly.

"Is—is Mr. Fletcher in the house now?"

"No, sir. He was sorry not to be able to welcome you, but he said it would be impossible for him to leave town for several days. He didn't expect the yacht in so soon, sir. You wrote him that you would stay over in Havana a few days, I believe."

"So I did," said Royden, and breathed an unconscious little sigh of relief. He must avoid seeing this man Fletcher.

For an hour Royden reveled in his newfound luxury. At the sound of a sonorous gong he went down to dinner. The delicacies which were served to him seemed strangely new, but none the less palatable; strangely enough, all those hard years had not succeeded in banishing the latent sense of the epicure within him.

After dinner he found his way to the library, a place of wainscoted walls and priceless carved oak. He sank into an armchair before a crackling fire, lighted a large Havana cigar, and gave himself up to the ecstasy of sheer contentment. His optimism grew; he began to entertain hopes of a prolonged stay at Cedar Point. Perhaps he might even draw a hundred thousand dollars before he decided to sink into oblivion. Why not? The thing was so much easier than he had expected!

He went to New York the next morning in the buff-upholstered limousine which he found waiting for him. In the busy, hurrying crowds of Wall Street he met no one who seemed to recognize him. As he entered the Hudson National Bank, where Blackstone kept his money, he felt a sudden qualm of terror. Supposing he should fail—at the critical moment? Presently he recovered his self-possession sufficiently to send one of Blackstone's cards into the vice president's office.

A stout, nervous little man came hurrying out to meet him. He grasped Royden's hand eagerly.

"Glad to see you home again, Mr. Blackstone. Many years since I've seen you, isn't it? I hope we managed the Amazon transactions to your satisfaction. And that last loan, to the Para people, how about that?"

Royden nodded hurriedly.

"I'll have to go into that with you later."

The little man babbled on.

"You've changed somewhat, Mr. Blackstone, but I never forget a man's face—once I've seen it. It must have done you good down there. You actually look younger than when you left—ten years ago, wasn't it?"

He broke off, suddenly aware that Royden was growing impatient.

"Is it a check to-day, Mr. Blackstone?"

"Yes," said Royden, "I'm afraid I'll have to trouble you for a pretty big one. Lost all my ready cash when my yacht sank—you've probably read about it in the papers. Well, you'd better give me—say—five thousand, in thousand-dollar bills."

The vice president smiled.

"We're used to big sums when dealing with you, Mr. Blackstone."

In the privacy of his cabin aboard the *Culebra* Royden had given Blackstone's signature infinite study. And so, for the second time in his life, he put his pen to a check and signed, with a careless assurance, a name that was not his. He left the bank ten minutes later.

To Royden that first day in New York was like a strange, vivid dream. Everywhere he went the mere mention of Blackstone's name evoked deference and respect. The Fifth Avenue tailor, from whom he ordered several suits of the finest imported cloth, took infinite pains with his measurements. He dined at the best hotels, upon the fat of the land, and spent the evening witnessing a Broadway musical show from the isolated splendor of a twenty-five-dollar box.

It was some time after midnight when his limousine drew up before the marble steps of Cedar Point. Royden found his bedroom uncomfortably close that night, and just before getting into bed he crossed over to the window to draw apart the heavy silken curtains. A faint, rose-scented breath of air drifted in from the terraces below. He drew the curtains swiftly apart; a man stepped out from behind them. Royden saw the gleam of a revolver leveled at his head and threw up his hands instinctively.

The stranger, a wizened, shabbily dressed little creature, backed him step by step toward the bed.

"John Blackstone," he said, "I've been waiting fifteen years for this moment. Sit down on that bed, don't move—and listen to me."

He was an old man, puny and wrinkled, but the unflinching purpose in his steely gray eyes made Royden suddenly afraid. He sat down hurriedly upon the edge of the bed.

"Blackstone," said the other sharply. "Do you remember the Golden Arrow copper mine?"

Royden had, of course, never heard of the Golden Arrow, but he nodded instinctively. It was becoming second nature with him to play the part of John Blackstone. But he wished fervently that the old man would put down that revolver.

The stranger nodded toward an ormulu clock ticking on the marble mantelpiece.

"It is now ten minutes before one, Blackstone. At one o'clock I am going to shoot you. And if you shout, or try to offer any kind of resistence before that time, I'll not hesitate to put a bullet through you at once. Still, I think it's only fair to let you know why you're going to die—so I'm going to tell you my story."

Royden felt the sweat beading upon his brow. Who was this creature who had hidden himself to await his coming? A madman, probably. Perhaps he could humor him—until relief came. Just then the hands of the ormulu clock jumped a fraction of a minute, with a nerve-wracking little whir and——

"Listen," he began desperately, "I'm not the man——"

But the other motioned him to be silent.

"I know all about it," he said with a grim smile. "You took all my money, and the money of hundreds of others, with your sweet promises. And you knew all the time the thing wasn't worth a damn cent, curse you!

"On account of you my wife is dead, of a broken heart—she died penniless—and my children are slaving their youth away in a factory. Oh, I know you all right, John Blackstone. Don't think I'm mad—I learned of your trickery after you'd fled to Brazil, and I vowed that if you ever returned to this country you wouldn't live forty-eight hours—and I'm here to keep that vow!"

Royden's voice broke the stillness then, and it was shrill with terror.

"How do you know that I'm John Blackstone? You can't prove it!"

The little man sneered.

"Of course I know you. It was you, yourself, who persuaded me into that devilish scheme. I was a clerk in the National Wheel Company, when you were president of it. I suppose you'll say you don't remember that morning when you called us into your office——"

"No!" Royden shouted. "I don't remember. Because I'm *not* Blackstone!"

The stranger stared at him for an instant, and then burst into laughter.

"My God! You've got a sense of humor, haven't you—to think I'd swallow that? You've grown a little thinner, perhaps—maybe you had to work down there, instead of growing fat on poor men's money——"

Royden glanced fearfully at the clock. It lacked but four minutes of one.

"For God's sake," he whimpered, "listen to me! I'm not Blackstone. He's dead—at

the bottom of the sea. I'll tell you how it happened—only, put that thing away—give me a chance!"

The stranger was fingering his revolver.

"I suppose I'll have to listen," he said wearily, "but you'll die just the same—so what's the use?"

Then Royden poured out his story in a torrent of words, almost incoherent at times, while the other listened with a contemptuous curl of his lips. In frantic haste he outlined everything that had happened to him since the yacht struck the reef, but he kept his head enough to omit any mention of the tattoo. He felt, somehow, that that part of the affair would seem incredible—and the other man had apparently failed to notice the blemish upon his wrist. He slipped his hands furtively into the pockets of his dressing gown. At two minutes before one he finished his story.

"So you see," he concluded breathlessly, pleadingly, "I'm no more John Blackstone than you are, and——"

"It's ingenious," snarled the other, "mighty ingenious. But I don't swallow it. In a moment that clock is going to strike one——"

His bright little eyes shone with sudden triumph.

"But listen. I'll give you a sporting chance. There's one way—only one—in which you can convince me that you're not John Blackstone. He had a starfish tattooed on his wrist—we clerks used to joke about it, I remember. Seems he had it done when he was a kid, after a wild party."

Royden's cheeks were white as death itself.

"You've no right——" he whimpered, but the old man had risen from his chair, flourishing his weapon.

"Quick! Show me those hands!"

Royden's hands shot above his head. Upon the tanned skin of his right wrist a five-pointed starfish was tattooed.

"Ah!" shouted the other triumphantly. "I thought so. There's the proof."

He raised his revolver swiftly. Royden's muscles tensed; he was all alert, ready to spring; he wasn't going to die like that—without putting up a fight. Just then the ormulu clock whirred—and struck one.

The old man's brows were knitted in a puzzled frown; he kept his revolver leveled, but he seemed suddenly and curiously baffled.

"Don't try to move," he commanded, "but answer me. Where did you get that tattoo—if you're not John Blackstone?"

Royden felt certain now that the man was crazy.

"It was done when I landed," he said, "to imitate Blackstone. For God's sake—why do you ask that?"

The old man smiled—a queer, twisted little smile.

"Because," he said very slowly, "you've saved yourself—by a fool's mistake. John Blackstone's tattoo was on his *left* wrist!"

Suddenly he darted across the room, and flung open a closet door. Two men, in evening clothes, stepped out, blinking in the sudden glare.

"Gentlemen," said the old man, "you have heard the confession. The moment I saw this fellow in a Fifth Avenue tailor's this morning—and heard him give Blackstone's name—I knew that he was not my lifelong friend. His slip in the tattoo matter only served to confirm my suspicions. Instead of denouncing him there I decided to make him confess. You bet me that I couldn't; I think I've won my bet—in ten minutes."

To Royden, haggard and miserable, he turned with a smile.

"You see," he explained softly, "I happen to be Harris Fletcher, whose letter you stole from John's body. My poor fellow—besides that trivial mistake of the tattoo, you made another and much bigger error; you overlooked one thing—that when a big, lovable man dies, his friends live—to protect his memory."

White Treasure

By Anthony M. Rud

Author of "Jaylee's Buttonhole Shop," "A Turn That Turned Too Far," Etc.

It looked like an unsolvable problem that Uncle Zut had set his nephew—until Helen Morrill began to wonder just how much coal would be laid in by a man who knew that he would be dead before the fall

DURING the last six years he lived, Uncle Zut really amused me. By visiting me for a month or six weeks each year, and by stringent economies the rest of the time, he managed to make a go of it. In spite of the fact that I—and all his acquaintances, in fact—knew just why he came, it was his manner to assume a senile graciousness. One might think after seeing him at my bachelor board that he was conferring a distinctive favor upon me, and that I, instead of himself, was the indigent one.

The young men I chummed with often asked me why I kept the old duffer around, and I told them truly enough that I rather liked him, in spite of his peculiarities. Besides—and this was a point I rarely mentioned—when I had him alone at dinner, I invariably provided him with all the domestic champagne he would drink. Under the genial influence of his fifth or sixth glass from forty to fifty years dropped off Uncle Zut's imagination, if not off his wrinkled physique. He told tales of the south seas, of hunts for pirate treasure, of fights with the head hunters of Tierra del Fuego, and of various other wild adventures that I later transmuted into the stories that brought me my living. It mattered not at all that I suspected Uncle Zut of being a confirmed, alcoholic liar. His yarns were just as good material, even if he had been no farther south than Louisville, nor farther west than Sioux City.

Only once did he tell any of these stories when another person beside myself was present. That time Rolfe Hinman asked him, winking aside at me, why it was, if he had found all the caches of D'Elfrier the pirate, that he, Uncle Zut, didn't spread himself and get a good car to run around in?

Uncle Zut was not in the least abashed. He had owned a machine, he said, but it got in bad condition. "When I disposed of it," he went on with his bland champagne flourish, "I found to my dismay that I could not get another with the drive on the right-hand side. I knew I was too old to learn to drive another style, so I let it go."

"But some of the English machines are made to order with the drive to suit," pursued Rolfe, enjoying his joke. "Why don't you look up the Rolls-Royce, for instance?"

My aged relative actually beamed at this. "I certainly shall do so!" he answered. "And I am greatly indebted to you, Mr. Hinman, for the tip!" Somehow right then even the patent absurdity of Uncle Zut considering a twelve-thousand-dollar machine did not seem so funny. Rolfe only grinned, and changed the subject himself.

"He's so danged consistent in his lying you almost believe him!" was the way Rolfe put it later. Just for that estimate, which coincided with mine at the time, Rolfe was the first person I invited—but that is ahead of the story.

Uncle Zut died in an unusual manner. His physicians pronounced the case acute pernicious beri-beri, a disease which rarely attacks white men—and still more rarely attacks white men who are not sailors by profession. When I heard of it, it gave me an uncanny sort of thrill for an instant, mixed with pity for the old man. In his tales of the rice eaters of the south seas that dread disease had entered often. Sometimes the victims dried up like mudworms on the hot sidewalk, sometimes they bloated with dropsy, but always they died. At the end, as if the bacterium had come to him from one of his stories, he had passed on the same way.

I had not heard of his illness in time to speak to him alive, but I attended his funeral—the only one of his relatives to pay him this dismal tribute. On my way back I

stopped at the office of the undertaker, intending to pay his bill, but I discovered, to my astonishment, that Uncle Zut had provided for his own burial, even to purchasing a tiny lot in the cemetery and paying the mortician in advance.

"A queer duck," volunteered the young man with whom I spoke. "Nobody thought he'd have a cent, but he came in here one day and picked out the best casket we had in stock—walnut with nickeled clasps, and satin lined. Paid for it and for our auto hearse, with twenty-dollar gold pieces. Said he didn't want any carriages or cars, though, because nobody would come."

You may imagine my feelings when, a week later, I received a slim envelope addressed to me in Uncle Zut's familiar, stilted hand. The date at the top of the sheet of note paper was over a year old. The letter read:

MY DEAR NEPHEW: This note will come to you after my death. For five years you have been hospitable and kind to a foolish old man. Will you believe when I say that all through the year I have looked forward to the time I spent in your apartment?

All my life I have endeavored to be taken just for myself. As you know, the rest of our family has little use for aged paupers. Only you have been considerate. With them, as at first with you, I preferred to be unwelcome as a penniless old dotard rather than fawned upon because I had money to leave. That I have told you something of my life and adventures as a young man, and allowed you to imagine that I have run through several fortunes, must be attributed to your excellent champagne as much as to the fact that I attained a certain fondness for helping you with your magazine works. You have no notion how I reveled in those tales! They were memories, a little strange, perhaps, because your imagination erred often—and quite often failed completely—but still they were my own memories revivified on the printed page. Particularly that novel of the cannibals of the Horn!

It puzzles me a little why I hang on. Every one of the old devils with whom I sailed is dead ten years now. Parson Grimm was the last. Guess I must have been tough, or perhaps it's because I've been expecting to shuffle off now for nearly two decades. "A watched kettle——" you know. Anyway, I can feel the flutter in my pulse now, and that tells its own story. I don't care.

I am too wise a man simply to give you a fortune. You'd never appreciate it. For that reason I am going to make you use that imagination of yours. In my possession right now is the White Treasure of Ullan. All you have to do is find it. Don't bother about Ullan. He is dead, and I don't believe he made a big enough dent in history so his name is remembered. Just hunt in the house for the treasure. If you follow implicitly the directions my lawyer will give you, success must crown your efforts eventually. If your imagination is sharp you may win out in a week. Go to it! In my little cottage you will find many surprises, but the greatest of these will be the treasure, when you find it. ZUT.

The letter stopped abruptly. My breath, which I had caught in a gasp with the start of the second paragraph, was transmuted into a prolonged whistle. Uncle Zut leaving me a fortune! It was unbelievable! White treasure! What could that be? Silver? In that second the absurdity of my wizened old relative possessing as much as a thousand dollars struck me, and I laughed. Like as not he had written that note while he still was champagne drunk, and imagined himself the possessor of the pirate treasure he imagined he had found.

In going over the letter, line by line, I found subtleties I had not suspected in Zut, however. He had gauged his standing with the family to the fourth decimal place. None of them wanted even a call from the old fellow, for on his first round of the families—the year he appeared from the West—he spent a week with each of the four branches. At that I believe he would have extended this as he did when he came to my apartment, except for the fact that—after his financial condition was discovered—his welcome was none too cordial. Even the Brandons, the soul of hospitality in their own set, balked.

Zut had guessed my main failing as a writer, with uncanny insight. My imagination was faulty, at least for fiction purposes. In order to write even a tale I had to have nearly all the plot and action furnished me by life I observed or yarns which were spun to me. Given all the ingredients, I could mix a palatable dish.

The reason for this lay in my eight years of training as rewrite man on a scientific journal. In that place imagination had been a handicap. Patiently making good, I had schooled myself to doubt every assertion made in an article, to find corroborative evidence for every statement appearing in the script sent finally to the printer, and to steep myself in plain facts.

Zut had picked this out. Also, he had guessed that I lived right up to my rather limited income, and that I paid little attention to what practical business men term the "value of money." What if *all* that he had told me had been the truth? That thought sent a flood of chill and warmth over my

body. A fortune? Wild, impossible that such a thing should happen to me! Yet—— In a voice that trembled a little with excitement reason could not suppress, I called up Helen Morrill.

"I—I am coming right over!" I told her. "I have a—a proposition to make to you!" Always when I talk to Helen my vocabulary grows atrophied and banal.

"But *Hervi!*" she protested. "I'm just eating my breakfast. My hair——"

"Darn your hair—oh, I beg your pardon, Helen! I'm excited as all get-out!"

"I see you are." This was a trifle chillier.

"Oh, hang it, Helen!" I cried, forgetting all the barriers I had kept so carefully between us as safeguards against my own impulses. "It's important!"

"Yes?" At another time this cool question would have crumpled me into total discomfiture, but now something—maybe the magic of the letter's suggestion—made me throw prudence to the winds.

"Yes!" I said desperately, "I don't know whether you ever guessed, girlie, but I've been head over heels in love with you for two years. I've wanted to ask you to marry me, but I—I just couldn't. Your father showed me bills, bills, bills! I couldn't give those things to you——"

"Hervie!" she cried. "Remember you have a party line, and, besides, I—I don't like to be proposed to that far away! Did you say something about business?"

"No. Yes!" I answered confusedly "Helen, I——"

"Business hours begin for me at eleven," she returned, a hint of mischief behind the formality of her voice. "Suppose you drop in and see me then. After business is over, maybe I could persuade you to have lunch with mother and myself—purely social, you understand?" And though that meant over two hours of waiting, I had to agree.

II.

I spent the time in a feverish search through my four encyclopedias, disregarding the letter's statement that Ullan—the pirate, as I supposed, who had garnered the "white treasure" in the first place—would not appear.

No such name was listed, but that did not deter me. I looked up silver, expecting that in the history of this metal I might locate a clew. No hint was there. The subject of piracy was next, but though I accumulated a lot of useless data on the activities of such personages as Morgan and Kidd, I found no Ullan. Zut had known whereof he spoke; the man, if a pirate indeed, had made no dent in history.

Then I tried to imagine of what the treasure might consist. Diamonds or silver, probably, I told myself. These were white, if one was not too finicky in his choice of adjectives. All the while I was downing all the dictates of common sense, which whispered that poor old Uncle Zut simply had been the victim of a drunken delusion. It was the first and only time in my life that even the ghost of a chance for much money had come my way, and I insisted on giving that ghost a full chance to materialize. After I saw Helen I would run right out to Uncle Zut's little dwelling, and commence.

There is just one thing I don't even attempt in writing, and that is to describe Helen. Once or twice I've tried to make her the heroine of one of my stories, but when I get as far as comparing the blue-violet of her eyes to the depths of trout pools in the Sakuache Range, or describing the way her hair glistens in the light like spider webs of copper—well, I forget all about the story.

She is just the size I like, which is something indefinitely under five feet four—all depending on the height of heels she is wearing. When I'm not fighting with myself to keep from making love to her—and sometimes when I am—her mouth corners twitch just a little, as though she might be just about to smile. When she *does* smile, though—and here I go, forgetting all about poor old Uncle Zut, just as I said I would.

She was dressed differently that morning than I ever had seen her before—a plaid calico morning dress, and soft-soled slippers. Somehow I felt a little frightened right away. I never had called on a girl in the morning, but I rather supposed that they climbed right into silk frocks after breakfasting in bed—at least, in families like the Morrills, anyway.

"Come right in, Hervie," she greeted me, extending her hand with real cordiality. "I'm not going to make any excuses for my appearance, though. The upstairs maid left us last night, and I have had to help out ——" I saw nothing whatever wrong with her appearance, and said so, I imagine rather fervently.

It was funny, but just as soon as I felt I

had something of a right to talk to her of a certain matter my courage oozed right away. Before, when I knew my finances insufficient I had always pictured this moment as one of passionate and eloquent avowal. The truth was—well, different. I began by telling of old Zut.

This was nothing new, up to the point where I spoke of his letter. When Helen leaned over to read this her hair brushed my cheek. Scared? Say, I stammered, stuttered, and finally, when I could talk with some lucidity, I made a consummate ass of myself. "Helen," I said, so pale I could *feel* it, "if—if this pans out, if there is really a fortune there and I find it, I—I want you to be my wife."

Right now, looking at this sentence, I can see how Chauncey Olcott, or some of those old chaps on the stage might have made it impressive. I didn't. My voice ended up weakly, as if I didn't have the courage of my convictions at all—and really it was only because I *did* have them so terribly!

I didn't stop there. I told her I loved her. In fact, I think I said that about thirty times before she stopped me.

"Hervie," she said, and I noticed that her eyes didn't waver as she looked at me, "am I to understand that you are proposing marriage to me provided you find this money?"

"Y-yes!" I managed to blurt.

"Then I most certainly and unqualifiedly refuse!" she retorted. Rising to her feet, she bowed once, curtly, and swept out of the room. About two minutes later I came to myself sufficiently to find my hat and seek the door.

III.

The process of cementing up a broken plate never is interesting. The job is tedious, and also there is the certainty that the plate never will be quite as good as it was before the smash. I shall pass over two days, in which time I moved my own little heaven and earth to find out why Helen had thrown me down with so little regard for my feelings. I could have understood a simple refusal, with the usual corollary of an offer of undying friendship. All of my heroines did that sort of thing on occasion.

Helen had been too definite and too curt, however. I phoned, wrote, and even telegraphed, but she would not see me. Finally in despair I assaulted the house itself.

Emmons, the door man, brought down a calling card with a message on it for me. It said:

For your own sake, I hope you fail. I cannot see you. HELEN MORRILL.

Now it was not necessary for her to wish for my failure, even if she did not care for me in the least. A trifle resentful I went home, and, as I said, started the dubious job of rearranging myself after the smash. Thursday morning I took the local out to Glen Ellyn, where Zut's little place stood. Nine-tenths of my object in hunting for his white treasure had vanished, but I could not write with even the memory of it on my mind.

I had seen the house once before, at the time of the funeral, but as the funeral had taken place from the isolation hospital, I had not been inside. It was a cottage, once painted white, with green blinds. Now the weather had dirtied and chipped it, until the whole was a smudgy gray. The chimney, extending upward to the peak of the roof, and a foot higher, was dilapidated—sufficient bricks having fallen so that it seemed a miracle that the whole remained upright. Where the shingles had met on the gables now the bare rafters showed through from the street, and I knew that on a rainy day the roof would leak like a sieve.

I tried the front door, but as I expected, it was locked. Zut might have sent me the key, but anyway, he would not care now if I broke a window. Taking up my suit case, I made my way to the side and kicked in the only basement window showing. Tossing the grip down into the blackness, I let myself in and dropped four feet to the dirt floor. By the dim light from that window I made out a rickety stair leading up. This creaked and groaned under my weight, but I managed to make the doorway above without accident.

The room was Zut's kitchen. A small coal range occupied one corner. A pump, and a large basin set in a home-made table stood alongside. One end of the table was covered with oilcloth, and I grinned at the thought of the old codger in here cooking his meals and eating them there beside the stove. A fortune, indeed! I was a bigger fool than I supposed grew wild in the city of Chicago.

Two rooms beside the kitchen occupied the remainder of the ground floor. One of these was fixed up with a single chair—a

decrepit morris chair with the back propped up against the corner of the wall—and two bookcases of four sections each. Volumes of all descriptions were piled helter-skelter on the shelves and tops of the cases, while on the floor was a litter of newspapers and periodicals completely covering the ancient grass rug. In the tiny living room outside were more papers, a table and a corroded brass lamp, beside two straight-backed chairs, one of which lacked a leg.

On a packing box in the corner stood a small talking machine; the space inside the box itself being utilized for records. I reached down and drew out a pair of these. They were both instrumental, one a double-faced record of Chaminade and the other a selection of the more popular airs from "Forza del Destino." I smiled. I could imagine old Zut sitting here alone and playing ballads or popular songs, but scarcely listening to the tenuous melodies of the "Scarf Dance" or the heavy harmonies of "Swear In This Hour." He was a funny one, all right.

As I was just about to ascend the stairs to the half story above, I chanced to glance out through the glass in the front door. A light wagon such as painters use had drawn up at the curb. The driver, a wiry, undersized chap of middle age was attaching a weight to the horse's bit. As he turned to ascend the stoop I saw he wore a black derby hat, trim mustache, and clothes that while evidently not his best still were creased and brushed meticulously. He seemed hurried. I stayed to watch as he nervously fitted a key to the lock and opened the front door.

His start of surprise was genuine. No doubt it was a real shock to come face to face with a stranger at the door of a house supposed to be empty. I simply waited, leaning on the stair railing.

"Why!" he exclaimed, drawing back. "Who are you?"

"It's my privilege to ask that question first," I parried, for I did not care especially for his looks—and suddenly the presence of the alleged treasure had become very real to me.

"I—I am the landlord!" he stuttered, and then his self-possession returned. "Mr. Zutphen Taylor rented this place from me. You know, I suppose, that he died recently?"

"Yes, I know." The facile gravity of his voice made me distrust him more.

"Well, you see," and he rubbed his hands briskly, "his month was up last Saturday. As I cannot afford to have the place stand long unoccupied, I thought to move his effects to storage until I could get a tenant. At the disposal of his heirs, of course." And he rubbed his hands again.

This sounded like a perfectly reasonable procedure for a landlord, but it was exactly opposed to my plans. In fact, I had taken for granted that Zut owned the little house, though why I should have thought so did not now occur readily to me. Certainly his letter had not stated this to be the fact.

"So you haven't a tenant yet," I observed, adding instantly, "and because of the sickness here I don't suppose anybody will want the place right away."

"No, probably not," he returned. "And it's a pretty high rent, too."

"How much?"

This time there was no doubt about his hesitation. "F-forty dollars a month," he replied, and I saw his eyes shift quickly away and then back to mine.

"*Forty!*" I cried incredulously. "Uncle Zut paid forty dollars a month for this little place? Impossible!"

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is what I'm holding it for now. I had thought some of moving in myself."

I stepped up close to him. "All right, Mr. Landlord," I said. "I have real reason to want to live here. I'll pay your forty a month. Just send a lease down here and I'll sign it. What is your name?"

He squirmed. "Jonas White," he admitted. "I—I rather think, though, that I would prefer not to rent at all," he went on. "Fact, I'm sure I shall need the place for myself, and——"

His sentence broke off in the middle as I seized his shoulders and marched him to the door.

"If you are really the landlord, Mr. White," I said firmly, "you may either send down a lease to me or have me evicted. If you try the last, though, you are going to get into a lot of trouble. I am the heir of Mr. Zutphen Taylor, and I can make a pretty shrewd guess at the reason why you want possession of this house. I think a court will give me a chance at that lease, if I want to fight—and I certainly do!"

This was mere bluff on my part. I had no least idea whether or not any court would sustain me in my demand for use of the

premises while conducting a hunt for my legacy. But it seemed to dismay Jonas White. With a muttered sentence I could not catch he backed down the steps, and drove away. When his rig was out of sight on the road toward the village, I turned and mounted the stairs.

IV.

Two small rooms opened from the box-like hallway at the head of the stairs. One was devoid even of a scrap of furnishing, a forlorn coffin of a place with the ceiling cut off to a height of four feet at one side, and sloping to seven feet at the other. One window, not more than a foot square, showed the ancient wall paper hanging in tatters, and the floor boards loose underfoot. Because of my ignorance of beri-beri I had to conquer a real aversion in the investigation, but I was reckless. For two years I had builded much on Helen Morrill. Now she had broken with me so definitely that she could wish me to fail! Gritting my teeth I drew my small hatchet from my pocket. I'd show her! If there was any treasure hidden in this tumble-down shack I would find it.

Reaching up I could touch every foot of the ceiling and walls with the hatchet. It was my plan simply to search every possible place for a hidden cupboard or loose panel. In my stories I always had used such devices when it came to hiding treasure of any description.

Patiently I tapped the ceiling, consuming over an hour in the process. Beside getting many fragments of old plaster in my hair and eyes, I accomplished nothing. When I started on the wall my arms ached as if with neuritis, but I went on. I was getting very weary and famished when it happened. I remember I was just trying to figure out how I could get meals sent up to me, when suddenly the hammer end of my hatchet broke through the flimsy paper!

Thrilled by a wave of excitement, I dropped the hatchet on the floor, and tore away the paper with my fingers. A hole through the plaster, perhaps four inches square was revealed! Into this went my hand—and then my arm, when nothing met my fingers. Way back, a full ten inches, I touched something. It was a small package, tied in paper. Frantically I drew it out, only to have my heart sink clear to my boots when I saw the tiny dimensions. Nothing, unless it be a single large diamond, of that size could be worth much money. I tore off the brown paper wrapping. Into my palm fell a single twenty-dollar gold piece, bright and new, and a slip of folded paper.

I stared at the coin, entranced. This was real, anyway. Unfolding the paper, I forced myself to read. Scribbled in ink—Zut's hand, unmistakably—were these words:

> Starting here? Lack of imagination! However, keep at it. Here's day's wages. Z.

The wry old codger! He had figured out exactly what I would do, and planted this note! In that second my estimation of Uncle Zut rose several thousand per cent. He might have been the victim of delusions, and even a liar, but in that second one would have found difficulty in convincing me. That single double-eagle, lying in my palm, excited me as much as the scrape of Zut's spade on the corner of D'Elfrier's hidden chest had excited my old relative. It was yellow gold.

Day wages indeed! At that Zut had guessed my earning capacity pretty nearly. I thrust my arm once more clear to the back of the aperture, but nothing more was hidden there. My hunger completely driven from mind, I attacked the remainder of the wall in that bare bedroom and in the hall outside with a zest little less than fiery.

A pounding at the door knocker downstairs made me stop, with my hatchet held ready for a stroke. As I listened, the knock was repeated, resounding loudly through the empty hall. I tiptoed downstairs. Glancing through the glass—for I was none too anxious for visitors of any kind—I saw an old man, bearded, and dressed in overalls, on the stoop. He could scarcely be an emissary from the landlord, so I unlatched the door.

"Be you Mr. H. E. Taylor?" he asked, looking me over from head to foot with eyes that squinted.

"The same."

"Eh? You say——" He bent his ear nearer and cupped his hand to assist the sound transmission. "Come last spring I been a leetle hard of hearing."

"I say that I'm Hervie E. Taylor," I replied, somewhat louder. "Is there anything I can do for you?" The old chap had a kindly face, and I knew his infirmities were not shammed.

"You might," he answered, peering at me

again. "Is there anything in your clothes that proves who you be? I got to be sartin sure."

I grinned. Fishing in my hip pocket I brought out a wad of unopened letters—bills that I had not paid. "These letters all are addressed to me," I answered. "Is that enough?"

He brought out his spectacle case, adjusted a pair of silver-rimmed glasses, and held the letters up close. "I guess you be the man!" he admitted at length. "I've got something for you your Uncle Zutphen left. He didn't put much stock in them lawyer fellows, so I guess this here is a duplicate, signed and everything, of his will. Leastwise he said so, anyway. I was to give it to you." He handed over the long envelope, and turned to hobble away, but I stopped him. Hastily, while he waited, I tore open the envelope, and extracted the two documents within.

The first, to my astonishment, was a guarantee of title to the little house in which I stood. The so-called landlord, Jonas White —if that really had been his name—was a fraud! The confirmation of my suspicions made me grin in satisfaction at the memory of the summary manner in which I had got rid of him.

The second paper was the last will and testament of Zutphen Taylor. I just glanced through it sufficiently to see that I had been named as beneficiary, and that the little house and its contents had been the sum total of his possessions.

"Those are just what I wanted to see!" I exclaimed. "Here, let me give you something for your trouble." I slipped the twenty-dollar gold piece into his hand. He held the coin up close to his eyes and squinted at it.

"Twenty dollars! Glory be!" he ejaculated, in an awed voice. "I can't take that much, sir."

"It's worth it to me," I said. "Oh, and by the way. There is one thing more you can do for me, if you will. How can I get hold of some one who will get my meals for me up here? I'm not much of a hand at cooking, and I don't want to leave."

He grinned genially at me now. "Would you like some ham and aigs, with corn bread and jam, and maybe a bucket of coffee?"

Just then that sounded like the finest banquet in the world to me, and I said so.

"Well," he answered, "that's what the old woman'll get for to-night. If you want some I'll tell her to bring up a load, and then you can fix up with her for other times."

I made my order emphatic, for the mention of food had aroused the appetite I had forgotten. When the old man had gone I took a long drink at Zut's well, and this helped for the time being. To fill in the gap I went back to my hammering. With the ever-present prospect of stumbling across another one of Zut's caches—or the mysterious white treasure—I could forget not only my hunger, but also the vengeful heartsickness that burned in me whenever I though of Helen Morrill.

I am not a good loser, either at cards or love, though at the latter I have had little experience either at losing or winning. The whole affair seemed like a monstrous nightmare to me, however. I was hurt, angry, and ashamed all at the same time—more because Helen should find herself able to be so contemptuously decided than because of the actual refusal. Had I even suspected the truth right then, though, old Zut's treasure would have had a long wait, I am afraid.

At five-thirty I saw the bent figure of an old woman approaching. She carried a covered basket, and I guessed, joyfully, that it must be my dinner. Such proved to be the case, and I hunted up Zut's lone plate and some plated ware from the kitchen. While I was slaughtering more ham and eggs than I ever considered possible for a man to eat at one meal, the old lady told me that she and her husband kept a small grocery in the village. They had known my uncle well, and had performed the same service for him on several occasions. When I had finished, Mrs. Pfeiffer washed up the utensils. I gave her definite instructions to bring me three square meals a day, and when she mentioned her terms I promised just double, on the stipulation that all of the meals should be as good as the one I had finished.

After she left I got cigarettes out of my suit case, and sat down for a half hour of rest that had been well earned. In spite of the aching muscles in my arms and the heavy, soothing fumes of the Yenidge tobacco, I did not sit out the half hour, however. Instantly I thought of scores of places about the little house where a treasure might be secreted. Then my mind whirled to Helen, and this was even less comfortable. As a compromise, for I did not intend to wield that hatchet any more, I got up and

strolled down to the basement. Zut had called my starting at the top of the house an evidence of a lack of imagination. Very well, I should do a little prowling in his cellar. I struck matches, located a single gas jet and lit this, and looked around me.

In the center of the basement, with a pipe leading out to the chimney, was the hot-air furnace—a tiny one as such contraptions go. The rusted air pipes going upward looked only about half the size of those I had known in my boyhood; but, then, of course, this was a small house.

Behind the furnace stood the coal bins, one nearly empty while the other was filled. I was a little astonished at this sign of Zut's provident nature, as the month was only August; but then I remember how he had paid for his funeral in advance. This was a much more ordinary affair.

The first hint of another surprise came to me when I noticed how small the basement seemed. Somehow it did not take up anywhere near the whole floor plan of the house. Suddenly I saw! The rear end of the basement, behind the coal bins, was all boarded up! *Fully fifteen feet of the length of the house thus was shut off!* The treasure! My heart pounded like a hydraulic pump as I ran for my hatchet. What was it I could expect to find behind that partition?

The second that I attacked it with my weapon, however, I found that force was unnecessary. Part of the wooden wall gave beneath my blows, outlining a door. The catch was concealed at the top, but my trembling fingers found it and slid it open. I pushed the door. Inside was pitch dark. Before venturing forward more than one foot I struck a match. In the instant of that flicker my eyes popped as wide open as nature would allow. Before me, glinting its newness in the polish of its body and nickel trimmings, *stood a cream-white Rolls-Royce with a sedan body!*

V.

For a full minute I imagine I was dumb with amazement. Then I know I yelled—a bloodcurdling cry of surprise and triumph which surely would have roused an entire block in the city. Zut had not been fooling! Here was the surest proof in the world. Like one gone daft I jumped into the driver's seat, seizing the wheel as if I meant to drive straight through the wall of the house. Finding the switch, I snapped on the great headlights.

Then I found his second note. It was attached by a string to the steering column, and read:

> Thank Mr. Hinman again for me. The car was a great pleasure to me even if I could run it only after night—to keep the village people from suspecting I owned it. How soon did you find it? I figure now it will take you three days searching before you notice that this wall of the basement is camouflage. I built it in myself, and flatter myself I did a pretty good job. From the outside, too, you'd never know this was used for a garage, except for the tracks in wet weather—and I only drove when it was dry. You are getting warm now, Hervie, but you will never find the treasure until you learn to use your imagination. Observation of details will help, too. ZUT.

I tossed the letter in the seat beside me, and laughed. I had beaten his estimated time by two days on this discovery, at any rate! It really tickled my vanity a little. I got up, ran my fingers respectfully over the levers, tried the various buttons, and nearly jumped to the car roof when one of these unexpectedly materialized as a raucous electric horn.

It was *some* machine! Because I had never owned even a flivver—although I often had meditated just this purchase—I spent a half hour of pure delight, lifting the hood and gazing at the trim, efficient engine, and examining the air springs and other accessories. Zut had obtained a car with the drive on the right-hand side, and though I had never attempted running a machine with this feature, my fingers itched to take out the car and race it through the night. Caution forbade, however. In the morning I would get busy and finish up my search.

I looked at my watch. It was five minutes of nine. My aching muscles apprised me that this was bedtime. For the sake of a good day's work on the morrow I would have to turn in. A natural aversion to sleeping in the room Zut had occupied, when taken with his last illness, stopped me as I was stepping out of the machine. I got back, and pulling out one of the extension seats, I used this as a rest for my feet. Curled up on the luxurious upholstery of the back, I fell asleep in less than fifteen minutes.

I found out afterward that it was one-thirty when I woke. It was one of these starts that leaves you certain you must have heard something—straining your hearing

for another sound, and afraid as the dickens you'll hear it. Doubt did not last long. From the other side of the wooden partition I heard a scraping noise, then a dull thump. This was regular for about a minute, and then came a grunt that might have meant disgust! Some one was out there, all right! I got out of the machine as stealthily as possible, and tiptoed to the door.

Coming in I had not bothered to close this tightly, and through an aperture of a half inch I saw a light. It was one of these pocket flashes, lighting up a circle of dirt floor. Beside, it was a shadow that moved. It was a man, digging! For five minutes I held my place, muffling my breathing, and watching him.

He was not large, though I could not make out his features, as most of the time his back was turned. He was searching along the outside wall with his flash light. Every foot or two he would stop, place the lamp on the ground so its rays spilled over the spot that interested him, and dig with a spade he carried. Just a few seconds seemed to suffice him in each spot. I knew. He was hunting for my treasure!

Mastering the indignation that surged up in me, I waited until he got within ten feet of my hiding place. He might well be armed, so I could afford to take no chances. After what seemed an interminable time, however, I saw that I could reach him before he could level any sort of a weapon at me.

I leaped, throwing the door wide. I struck him at the hips, making a crude football tackle. He sprawled forward, screeching in dismay, with me on top. In that second I seized both his arms, and endeavored to pinion them to his sides. This was not as easy as I had thought, after feeling his light bulk in my grasp. The man was small, but wiry, and fought like a cornered rat. It was not until I had jammed his head into the dirt without mercy that he gave up. Then with my belt I lashed his wrists together behind him, and turned him over for a look at his face.

The second I lifted the flash light I recognized my captive. It was Jonas White! "So!" I ejaculated. "You're back again, eh?"

He snarled, drawing his lips back over his teeth like a jackal. "Yes!" he gritted. "And I'll have you arrested for this, too! A man can't be safe in his own house these days! I'll make you pay big! I was going to let you have the house, but now I won't! I'll sue you for damages, too!"

"You'll have a chance to tell all that to the judge!" I retorted. "In my pocket is a signed copy of my uncle's will. Also, with it is a deed to this place—a guarantee of title, I mean."

His wicked little eyes popped wide. "A forgery!" he gasped. "Your uncle left no will!"

Right then I saw light. "You were my uncle's lawyer while he lived, Mr. Jonas White!" I said slowly. "He didn't trust you very far, though, because you had some notion that he wasn't as poor as most people thought. He sent the real will and the other papers to me through another source. Now you're going up before the judge and tell him why you were attempting burglary on my place! You know better than I do what that means."

From the ghastly expression that came to his face as I spoke I saw I had hit the mark. He fairly drooled with fear, as soon as he saw I was really in earnest. He pleaded for mercy, and though at first I had no idea of letting him free, the notion occurred that I did not want him telling about the suspected treasure before I actually found it. Finally I decided not to prosecute him. Instead, I drew up a confession that he had been caught in the act of burglary, made him sign it, and then chased him out the front door. I knew his yellow type. Morning would find him just as far from Glen Ellyn as a train could take him.

VI.

It is not my intention to detail all the disappointments that I encountered in the next three days. I started next morning early, with an enthusiasm that I thought boundless. Because of finding the big automobile in the basement, I continued my search there. I dug up every square foot of the dirt floor and sounded the walls, but all without further result. I even crawled under the car and turned up the earth beneath with a hand trowel, but without uncovering Zut's hiding place.

When I came to the coal bins I first searched the one nearly empty. Then I laboriously shoveled all of the soft coal out of the second bin into the first—and it was a hard job, too! I never before had realized that coal was so heavy; the labor, finished

just before Mrs. Pfeifer brought my dinner that evening, left me black from head to foot and tired beyond description. After eating, I went down and examined the floor of the second bin carefully, but nothing showed. Somewhat disgusted, I went up, took a sponge bath at the pump—there was no bath tub in the house—and retired for sleep in the car again.

Next morning I made one discovery. I had abandoned the search belowstairs, and had tackled the remainder of the second floor. Zut's bedroom yielded nothing, however. It was not until I tackled the library that I found my only other clew. One of the books in the cases—I took every one out and looked at it carefully—proved to be a box bound to resemble a volume.

Therein I discovered a pile of old jewelry. It was not imposing, though many of the set stones were large—they might be rubies, diamonds, and sapphires, though they did not seem to possess the luster. It might have been the old corroded settings, however, for these were so heavy in some cases as almost to surround the gems.

At the bottom of the pile was another of Zut's notes:

> Not the White Treasure. Just the personal jewelry of Ferdinand Ullan, sometimes called Ulloa. Keep on! ZUT.

I reëxamined the rings and brooches. *If* the stones were real, one of the diamonds would make a magnificent solitaire. The old setting, of course, was out of the question. I tried the ring on my little finger, but it would not pass the second joint. Old Ullan must have been a little shaver, I decided. Wrapping up the ensemble, with the single exception of the solitaire, which I slipped in my vest pocket, I thrust it in my suit case for future examination. Right then I was after the treasure; the search had become an obsession.

The rest of that day was fruitless. On the next morning I covered the whole of the remainder of the house. It was with a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach that I pounded the last time on the walls. I had failed! Old Zut was right. I was not able to imagine any place in the whole house in which I had not looked. There remained only one recourse. I could knock down the walls and take up the floors. Somewhere there might be a safe or a boxed-in partition hidden, that had escaped me.

A sudden thought came to me. The registers! Taking out every one of these I continued the search. When nothing showed, I tied a weight on the end of a stout cord, and plumbed the pipes from the furnace below. All was without result.

I knocked off work, and sat down to think it out. There was little doubt in my mind now that about the house, somewhere, a real treasure was concealed, but so far as I could see I was just as far away from discovering it as ever. It was my lack of imagination without doubt, but just then I felt a little bitter at my uncle for his infernal cleverness. If he knew I would not be able to find his fortune, why had he not given me a chance to work for it, or else said nothing whatever. I had been comparatively happy before. The news in his first letter, though, had ruined my peace of mind forever. Even if I *did* get the treasure it would be very lame consolation. Helen——

I moped around that house the whole remainder of a week. Sometimes I repeated my hammering on parts of the wall I had covered before. Mostly, though, I just smoked and swore, trying to dope out another possibility. The more I endeavored to think on the subject of a hiding place, however, the more I remembered Helen. Why should I worry about money, anyway?

It was Sunday afternoon before I actually did anything more. By that time I was desperate. I would go to see her, tell her that her wish had come true, and find out why she had been so hateful to me. Throwing the suit case in the big car, I swung back the siding that Zut had fixed for a door out. A moment later I was on the road to Chicago, piloting—rather drunkenly, I am afraid—a machine that nearly ran out from under me every time my foot touched the accelerator.

In the course of the fifteen miles into River Forest, however, I achieved something like familiarity with the splendid mechanism. When I turned in at the drive leading up to the Morrill home I flatter myself I did it rather well. I was so much taken up with bringing the machine to a stop, though, that I did not see Helen until I was mounting the steps. She was lying in a hammock on a corner of the open porch, reading. Even when I approached she continued reading with absorbtion, though she must have noticed the car coming in on the drive. I came right up to her side before she lifted her eyes.

"I see you have succeeded, Mr. Taylor," she said calmly and coldly, then nodding out at the Rolls-Royce.

"No, you have had your wish," I returned, stung by her manner. "I have failed!"

Her eyes widened with astonishment. "Then why—why the car? It's English, isn't it?" I wondered if I could be mistaken. It seemed to me now that she was not nearly so reserved.

"If you'd like to take a ride with me, I'll tell you about it," I answered bluntly.

With one last glance at the magazine she bowed assent. I placed her in the seat beside me in the car, and drove out and away. Scarcely heeding direction, I chose the road north. Not until the last house of the town was behind us did I speak again. Then, slowing to a stop, I related briefly the whole story.

"And now I seem to have lost at every point," I concluded bitterly. "The fortune did not mean anything much to me except as a means for giving you all to which you have been accustomed. Perhaps that is why my—my imagination won't work as it should."

"Hervie," she said, and I was sure now that there was almost a smile on her lips, "that is not a new fault. Before ever you went out to Glen Ellyn you lacked imagination *completely!*"

I suppose I still have that fault, but I am not totally lacking in common sense. Right then I proposed again, and to my bewilderment and joy was accepted promptly and blushingly.

"We can sell this car and those rings, and later perhaps that little house. That ought to give a capital of fifteen or eighteen thousand. With what I make——" At this point her hand on my mouth interrupted speech.

"Stop right there, you silly boy!" she demanded. "Don't you mention money again! You ought to guess that what I wanted from you was a proposal without any strings to it. I'm not worried—or even interested—about your income. I've got plenty of my own. But to ask a girl if she will marry you *if*—don't ever do it again, Hervie, dear!"

"I won't!" I promised fervently.

The white treasure? Yes, I would have forgotten all about it, if it had not been for Helen. The story I told, and the rings of old Ullan I showed her aroused her curiosity, however. Nothing would do but I should drive her right out to the house. On the way she made me review every feature of the search.

"Do you know, Hervie," she asked, pondering, "that it seems very unlike your uncle to put in that much coal this early—particularly if he was rich and did not need to economize?"

"He paid for his funeral in advance," I reminded her.

"When?"

"Oh, along in February or March, I guess."

"Then he really had an idea that he was going to die?"

"Well, perhaps not. At least he did not suspect beri-beri. He knew that he could not last much longer, though. He said so in the first letter I received."

Helen nodded, smiling. "The first thing I'm going to do when I get to that house is look at that coal!" she announced. "It doesn't sound natural to me for an old man to lay in a binful when he is expecting to die any minute!"

And she did. When she took that first shovelful out into the light even I had to admit that there was something peculiar looking about it, for even my remonstrance that we were looking for a white treasure, not a black one, had not stopped Helen.

"Hervie, you vex me sometimes!" she cried. "Even I can see that this isn't coal. Now you know something about geology and chemistry and such things. *What is it?*"

Thinking hard, I took up a handful of the substance I had thought coal. It was mostly a jet-black powder, but here and there through it occurred lumps of various sizes. These, when the powder had been brushed off, were not totally black, but grayish rather, and heavy—much heavier than any sort of coal, now I had it brought to my notice. Through my brain raced a series of eliminations. It must be some heavy metal—not gold, for gold does not make any ordinary black compounds—not silver, probably—— In that instant I had it.

"Platinum black! Platinum!" I cried, my heart jumping with the certainty that I was right. "See it is heavy!"

"Platinum?" repeated Helen, wrinkling her forehead incredulously. "That black stuff? Why, I have a pin of platinum, and that is whitish."

"White treasure!" I yelled exuberantly.

"Helen, you've found it! Listen! When you melt platinum with zinc in the proportions of one to two, and then take away the zinc by the action of sulphuric acid, finely divided platinum is left. This is black in color—platinum black they call it in the laboratory. The lumps——" I stopped, for I did not know then about the lumps myself.

"Then—then it ought to be a fortune, after all," she ventured.

"Fortune?" I echoed. "I guess yes! Why, there must be eight or nine tons of it there. I know, because I shoveled it myself! Platinum is worth about one hundred dollars an ounce. That means sixteen hundred a pound. There are two thousand pounds to a ton, and say eight tons——" I stopped. As I have said before, my imagination is faulty.

A metallurgist friend of mine corroborated my guess that evening. I took the platinum sample he melted in to a jeweler's shop, and had the large diamond of Ullan set for an engagement ring. The lumps in the bin, proved to be alloy—platinum from which the zinc never had been removed. Even with that much base metal, however, the bin was proved to contain a treasure greater than I ever had imagined in my wildest dreams.

A week later, when Helen and I were superintending the removal of the last of it by motor express, old Pfeiffer hobbled up to the house. He had one more letter for me from Zut. My uncle had instructed him to wait until three weeks after I had taken possession of the house before delivering this last message.

The letter explained how my relative had stumbled across an ancient map, in his wanderings. This map, purporting to be dated March 3, 1736, told how a great white treasure had been hidden by Ferdinand Ullan, or Ulloa, who had discovered it in the sands of the river Pinto, near Popayan, Colombia. Searching out this cache, my uncle had recognized the metal as platinum—which its discoverer had thought to be silver, later finding his mistake and not deeming the cache worth seeking out. For the sake of safety in carrying, Uncle Zut had changed the white platinum to platinum black, and thus had brought it into the States.

We kept the big white car, and when Helen and I returned from our honeymoon we took my old friend Rolfe Hinman for a ride. "Old Zut told the truth so well we all thought he was lying!" I told him, winking.

HE AND HERODOTUS

WHEN it came to historical allusions, the young orator was loaded for bear. But he was embarrassed. Every time he thought of the tremendous effect which his speech might have on the fortunes of the candidate for whom he spoke, he turned a pale and anæmic green. His thumping heart pounded his lungs. His Adam's apple gagged him. Facing the expectant thousands in front of him, he gulped painfully four times before he could utter a word.

Then he began:

"Friends and fellow citizens: Herodotus tells us——"

"Who's he for?" interrupted a shrill and irreverent voter.

The fuming young orator was indignant, but, having made the start, he was determined to go through with his message. He continued:

"Herodotus tells us of a whole army being put to flight by the braying of a single ass. And——"

This time he was interrupted by thunderous and hysterical applause. The cheers shook the roof. An appreciative smile wreathed the speaker's face until another voice from the crowd advised him:

"Young man, proceed! This army's been tested."

A Chat With You

HERE is a letter from a man who, right or wrong, has ideas. Ideas are always interesting:

"What I like about THE POPULAR is that it is a man's magazine. That, I think, has something to do with its success. Women, as a class, read more fiction than men do, but in their magazine tastes they are not as constant as men. Once get men to reading your magazine and you are sure of success. Women want to be taken out into an imaginary world that is as unlike the actual world as possible. Men want the real thing.

"I have tried all the fiction magazines, but there is only one for me, THE POPULAR. I have lived in the West, all the way from Idaho to El Paso, and I've read Western yarns in some of the other magazines that were so unlike anything anybody ever saw in the West that I became really anxious to meet the authors and to talk to them more in anger than in sorrow, and to ask them where they got that stuff. But I know when I turn up a yarn by B. M. Bower or Norton or Knibbs or Coolidge, that I am going to see real people such as I have known and not a bunch of he-dolls dressed up in hairy chaps and decorated with six-guns.

"Similarly, I've been about a little in the southern Pacific, and I can recognize Stacpoole's people when I meet them in his stories. I've known some of them in actual life and I know that he knows what he is talking about, and it's a relief after some of the stuff I've waded through. There are not many estimable people from a Sunday-school standpoint in the South Seas and Stacpoole knows it.

"Men like to read about the experiences they have actually had, they like to read stories of business and finance as well. If I had such a thing as a bottle of Scotch, I'd be willing to bet a good three-finger drink out of it. that a big proportion of the readers of THE POPULAR were men who had been there themselves. Women like to be bunked, but men don't. Look at the alleged bargains in the stores women patronize and consider that when a man buys a hat he generally gets real felt, while a woman buys a rag and a few feathers for twice the price.

"You have one magazine that never tries to bunk its readers. Some stories are better than others, but it is all on the level and no jazz. And so I'm pulling for you and wishing you good hiking on the trail of men's fiction.

Yours, MICHAEL STROUTH.

"New Dorp, Staten Island."

MR. STROUTH has ideas, but we cannot quite agree with all of them. Try THE POPULAR on a woman some time. Try some woman with Jim Fellom's novel, "The Wherewithal," in the present issue. Ask her to read the first installment of Raine's story, "In Bonanza," and see if she doesn't want

more of it. We feel sure that B. M. Bower has thousands of women readers, and that nine women out of ten would be charmed with the color and life of Stacpoole's stories. As for women being more fickle than men, who got up that idea, anyway? A man, of course. They've even set it to music in the opera of "Rigoletto," but the plot of that opera indicates greater fickleness on the part of the male of the species. As to the price and value of millinery, Mr. Strouth, we decline to answer on statutory grounds. There must be a reason for it. There's a reason for everything. We think hats for men cost too much. There used to be a time when a man could get a Stetson made of real beaver for—— But what's the use of talking? No use.

WE don't think that women like to be bunked. We don't think any one likes it. We think the world is tired of it and getting more tired of it every minute. We proceed on that assumption. That's why Mr. Strouth and a lot of people like him support the magazine. We have two or three simple rules from which we will not deviate. One is that an author must know what he is talking about. Another is that he must not give false impressions of life and human nature. That is plain dishonesty, and we hate it. Also, we don't want to make false promises in a story. Let us explain. It would astonish any one not used to the reading of manuscripts to know how many stories start off well and fall flat before many pages. Starting a story is like starting a fight. Almost any one can do it, and do it well. It is winding up the fight and the story in a soul-satisfying climax that marks the exceptional man. The start of a POPULAR story never promises anything it does not fulfill. We always deliver the goods.

ALSO, we think men like to read about places they have not seen and men they have not known. How many have visited the Everglades of Florida? Don't all stand up at once. You might shake the building. What! Not so many, after all!

Elmer Brown Mason has spent months in the Everglades on government research work. He is going to take you there in two weeks from to-day. His novel, "The Golden Turtle," will appear complete in the next issue.

It has the real color and atmosphere of one of the most interesting of the world's wild spots. It has a real man and a human girl in it—humor, as well. It makes a good start and keeps on steadily getting better. Also, in the next number there is a thrilling novelette of the race course by Peter Clarke MacFarlane. We have always liked racing stories, and this is one of the best yet by a man who knows. "Hope on the Hoof" is the title. Also, in the next number you will find Bower, MacLaurin, Ferguson, Crabb, Stacpoole, and other writers who never start anything they can't finish. Thanks for the letter, Mr. Strouth.

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